JUDITH OF THE GODLESS VALLEY

HONORÉ WILLSIE

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2026

https://archive.org/details/judithofgodlessv0000hono

The Old Corner
Book Store, Inc.
Boston, - Mass.

JUDITH OF THE GODLESS VALLEY

JUDITH OF THE GODLESS VALLEY

By HONORÉ WILLSIE

Author of

"The Enchanted Canyon," "The Forbidden Trail," "Still Jim," "The Heart of the Desert," etc.

A. L. BURT COMPANY

Publishers New York

Published by arrangement with Frederick A. Stokes Company

Printed in U. S. A.

Copyright, 1922, by
HONORÉ WILLSIE

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

		PAGE
I	Lost Chief Schoolhouse	1
II	Oscar Jefferson	25
III	The Graduation Dance	46
IV	The House in the Yellow Canyon	68
V	The Hunt on Lost Chief	84
VI	Little Swift Crosses the Divide	105
VII	The Post-Office Conference	122
VIII	Judith at the Rodeo	142
IX	The Trip to Mountain City	162
X	Wild Horses	181
XI	The Log Chapel	202
XII	The First Sermon	221
XIII	Prince Goes Marching On	242
XIV	The Battle of the Bulls	259
XV	The Flame in the Valley	276
XVI	The Trail Over the Pass	295
XVII	Black Devil Pass	312
XVIII	Elijah Nelson's Ranch	322
XIX	Home	340

JUDITH OF THE GODLESS VALLEY

CHAPTER I

LOST CHIEF SCHOOLHOUSE

"To believe in a living God; to preach His Holy Writ without fear or favor; to sacrifice self that others may find eternal life; this is true happiness."

—*The Rev. James Fowler.*

IT was Sunday in Lost Chief; Sunday and mid-winter. For the first time in nearly ten years there was to be a sermon preached in the valley and every one who could move was making his way to the schoolhouse.

Douglas Spencer drove his spurs into Buster and finished the last hundred yards at a gallop. Judith, his foster sister, stood up in her stirrups, lashed Swift vigorously over the flanks with the knotted reins and when Buster slid on his haunches to the very doorstep, Swift brought her gnarled fore legs down on his sweeping tail and slid with him. She brought up when he did with her nose under his saddle blanket. The boy and girl avoided a mix-up by leaping from their saddles and jerking their mounts apart.

"Now look at here, Jude!" shouted Douglas, "you keep that ornery cow-pony of yours off of me or I'll make you sorry for it!"

Judith put her thumb to her small red nose, and without touching the stirrups leaped back into the saddle. Then she looked calmly about her.

"First ones here!" she said complacently. "Even the preacher hasn't come."

"I suppose,"—Doug's voice was bitter—"that if I rode over toward Day's to meet Jimmy you'd have to tag!"

"I sure-gawd would. Swift would like the extra exercise."

Douglas swept Judith's thin bay mare with a withering glance. "That thing! Looks like the coyotes had been at it!"

Judith wore but one spur and this had a broken rowell, but she kicked Swift with it and Swift whirled against the nervous Buster and bit him on the cheek. Buster reared. "Take that back, you dogy cowboy you!" shrieked Judith.

Douglas brought Buster round and raised his hand to strike the girl. She eyed him fearlessly. The boy slowly lowered the threatening hand and returned her gaze, belligerently.

Prince, a gray, short-haired dog, of intricate ancestry, squatted on his haunches in the snow with his tongue between his teeth and his eyes on the two horses. Swift sagged with a sigh onto three legs. Perhaps the little mare deserved some of the aspersions Douglas and his father daily cast upon her. She was a half-broken, half-fed little mare which Douglas' father had cast off. She did not look strong enough to bear even Judith's slim weight. But as the only horse Judith was permitted to call her own, the little bay was the very apple of the young girl's eyes, and she wheedled wonderful performances from Swift in endurance and cat-like quickness.

Buster was a black which the older Spencer had bred as a cow-pony but had given up because he could not be broken of bucking. Doug had begged his father for the horse, and Buster, nervous, irritable and speedy, was a joy to the boy's sixteen-year-old heart.

Douglas sat tall in the saddle. He measured, in fact,

a full five feet ten inches without his high-heeled riding-boots. He was so thin that his leather rider's coat bellowed in the wind, and the modeling of his cheekbones showed markedly under his tanned skin. His sombrero, pushed back from his forehead, disclosed a thick thatch of bright yellow hair above wide blue eyes that were set deep and far apart. His nose was high bridged, and his mouth, though still immature, gave promise of full-lipped strength in its curves.

Judith was fourteen and only a couple of inches shorter than Douglas. She was even thinner than he, but, like him, glowing with intense vitality. She had hung her cap on the pommel of her saddle and her curly black hair whipped across her face. She had a short nose, a large mouth, magnificent gray eyes and cheeks of flawless carmine. She wore a faded plaid mackinaw, and arctics half-way up her long, thin legs.

"I hate you, Doug Spencer," she said finally and fiercely, "and I'm glad you're not my real brother!"

"I don't see why my father ever married a woman with an ornery brat like you!" retorted Douglas.

"I wouldn't stay to associate with you another minute if you offered me a new pair of spurs! I'm going to meet Maud!" And Judith disappeared down the trail.

Douglas eased back in his saddle and lighted a cigarette, while he watched the distant figures approaching across the valley. The glory of the landscape made little impression on him. He had been born in Lost Chief and he saw only snow and his schoolmates racing over the converging trails.

The Rockies in mid-winter! High northern cattle country with purple sage deep blanketed in snow, with rarefied air below the zero mark, with sky the purest,

most crystalline deep sapphire, and Lost Chief Valley, high perched in the ranges, silently awaiting the return of spring.

Fire Mesa, huge, profoundly striated, with red clouds forever forming on its top and rolling over remoter mesas, stood with its greatest length across the north end of the valley. At its feet lay Black Gorge, and half-way up its steep red front projected the wide ledge on which the schoolhouse stood. Dead Line Peak and Falkner's Peak abruptly closed the south end of the valley. From between these two great mountains, Lost Chief Creek swept down across the valley into the Black Gorge. Lost Chief Range formed the west boundary of the valley, Indian Range, the east. They were perhaps ten miles apart.

All this gives little of the picture Douglas might have been absorbing. It tells nothing of the azure hue of the snow that buried Lost Chief Creek and Lost Chief ranches. It gives no hint of the awful splendor of Dead Line and Falkner's Peaks, all blue and bronze and crimson, backed by myriads of other peaks, pure white, against the perfect sky.

It does not picture the brilliant yellow canyon wall which thrust Lost Chief Range back from the valley, nor the peacock blue sides of the Indian Range, clothed in wonder by the Forest Reserve. And finally, it does not tell of the infinite silence that lay this prismatic Sunday afternoon over the snow-cloaked world.

Douglas did not see the beauty of the valley, but as, far below, he saw Judith trot up to the Day's corral, he was smitten suddenly by his sense of loneliness. Too bad of Jude, he thought, always to be flying off at a tangent like that! A guy couldn't offer the least crit-

icism of her fool horse, that she didn't lose her temper. Funny thing to see a girl with a hot temper. Ordinary enough in a man, but girls were usually just mean and spitty, like cats. A guy had to admit that there was nothing mean about Judith. She was fearless and straight like a first-class fellow. But temper! Whew! Funny things, tempers! He himself always found it hard to let go of his rage. It smouldered deep and biting inside of him and hard to get out into words. He usually had to tell himself to hit back. Funny about that, when his father was always boiling over like Judith. He wondered if her temper would grow worse as she grew older, as his father's had. Funny things, tempers! People in a temper always looked and acted fools. The guy that could keep hold was the guy that won out. Like being able to control a horse with a good curb-bit. Funny why he felt lonely. It was only lately that he had noticed it. Here was Buster and here was Prince, and here was the approaching joke of the preacher. Why then this sense of loneliness? Maybe loneliness wasn't the right word. Maybe it was longing. And for what? Not for Jude! Lord, no! Not for that young wildcat. But the feeling of emptiness was there, as real as hunger, and at this moment as persistent. Funny thing, longing. What in the world had a guy like him to long for?

A long coo-ee below the ledge interrupted his meditation. A young rider leaped from the trail to the level before the schoolhouse, broke into a gallop and slid, with sparks flying, to the door.

"Hello, Scott!" said Douglas, without enthusiasm.

"I thought Jude was here!" returned Scott. He was older and heavier than Douglas, freckled of face and

sandy of hair, with something hard in his hazel eyes.

"He'd better leave Jude alone," thought Douglas, "the mangy pinto!"

There was a shriek and a gray horse, carrying a youth with the schoolmarm clinging behind him, flew across the yard and reared to avoid breaking his knees on the steps. The schoolmarm scrambled down, still screaming protests at the grinning rider. One after another now arrived, perhaps a dozen youngsters, varying in age from five to eighteen, each on his or her own lean, half-broken horse, each appearing with the same flying leap from the steep trail to the level, each racing across the yard as if with intent to burst through the schoolhouse door, each bringing up with the same pull back of foaming horse to its haunches. And with each horse came a dog of highly varied breed.

The youngsters had been racing about the ledge for some time before the grown people began to appear. The women, most of them very handsome, were dressed dowdily in mackinaws and anomalous foot covering. But the men were resplendent in chaps and short leather coats, with gay silk neckerchiefs, with silver spurs and embossed saddles.

When Judith returned with Maud Day there were thirty or forty people and almost as many dogs milling about the yard. The log school had weathered against the red wall of the mesa for fifty years. There probably was not a person in the crowd who had not gone to school there, who did not, like Judith, love every log in its ugly sides. Judith caught Douglas' sardonic gaze, tossed her curly head and urged Swift up the steps, where she looked toward the road to the Pass, shading her fine eyes with a mittened hand.

Finally she cried, "I see the preacher coming!"

"Somebody ought to go in and build the fire if we ain't going to freeze to death!" exclaimed Grandma Brown, jogging up on a flea-bitten black mule.

"He invited himself. Let him build his own fire!" cried Douglas.

Grandma pulled her spectacles down from her forehead to the bridge of her capable nose, and stared at Douglas.

"Well! Well! Doesn't take 'em long away from the nursing bottle to get smarty. Where's your father, Douglas?"

"Home with the toothache," replied Doug, flushed and irritated.

"Did he bring you up to let a stranger come to the house and build his own fire?"

"No, but it's the schoolmarm's job to build this one," replied Douglas.

"Jimmy Day, you and Doug go in and get that old stove going!" ordered Grandma.

Both boys dismounted slowly, tied their horses, and amidst a general chuckle, disappeared into the schoolhouse.

Charleton Falkner, a black-browed rider of middle age, with a heavy black mustache, turned his horse toward Grandma.

"That's right, Charleton," the old lady went on, "you come over here and help me off of Abe. I ain't going to stay out here freezing till old Fowler comes. Riding ain't the novelty to me it seems to be to the rest of you."

This was the signal for all the grown people to tie up their horses and enter the building. Shortly Douglas and Jimmy came out, and scarcely had remounted when the minister rode slowly up over the ledge. He dismounted at the door and greeted the youngsters.

They replied with cat-calls. Fowler stared at the group of robust young riders, his gray-bearded face somber, then he shook his head and opened the door.

Douglas jumped from his horse and, giving the reins to Jimmy Day, he followed the minister. The people within were seated quietly, and Doug slid into a rear bench. His eyes were very bright and he watched the preacher with eager interest. Mr. Fowler dropped his overcoat on a chair and strode up to the platform, where he smiled half wistfully, half benignly at his congregation. Then he raised his right hand.

"Let us pray!" he said. "O God, help me to speak truth to these people who ten years ago laughed me from this room. Help me to open their eyes that they may behold You! Show them that they lead a life of wickedness from the babes in arms to the very aged, from—"

"'Tain't any such thing!" interrupted Grandma Brown. "There you go again, after all these years!"

"If you've come here to preach old-fashioned fire and brimstone, Fowler," said Charleton Falkner, "you might as well quit now. None of us believe a word of it. We most of us think everything ends when they plant us in the cemetery yonder, that is, if they put on enough rocks so the coyotes get discouraged."

Douglas shivered. "I wonder if that's what I'll believe when I get to thinking about such things," he thought. "Hanged if I'll think of 'em till I'm old!"

"I'm with you, Charleton!" called Oscar Jefferson, rumpling his silvery hair with his soft white cowman's hand.

The Reverend Mr. Fowler leaned over the desk. "Charleton Falkner, aren't you man enough to admit that you folks here in Lost Chief lead a wicked life?"

"How do you mean, wicked?" demanded Charleton.

"I mean that you steal cattle, that you shoot to kill, that there is indecency among your children, that your young girls go unguarded and that your young men are no better than wild horses. I mean that your little girls drink whiskey. And I defy you to show me two mothers in the valley who have taught their children to pray and to walk with God."

"Aw!" sniffed Oscar Jefferson, "if that's what you've come a hundred miles to tell us, you'd better quit! That may do for foreigners and city slums, but it won't go down with the Lost Chief cowman. We're Americans, here."

"Americans!" cried Mr. Fowler. "How much does that mean?"

Jefferson rose to his full six feet. "By God, I'll tell you what it means! It means our ancestors conquered the Indians, in New England, that we fought the British in the Revolution and the rebels in the Civil War and the hombres in the Spanish-American War. It means that fifty years ago the father or the grandfather of every man in this room came out here and fought the Indians and the wolves and the Mormons—"

Charleton Falkner interrupted with his twisted smile that showed even, tobacco stained teeth. "Jeff, this ain't the Fourth of July celebration, you know!"

Jefferson somewhat sheepishly subsided to the desk on which he had been sitting.

"That's exactly why I came back!" cried the preacher. "I know that you and Lost Chief belong to the heroic early history of America. This should be a valley of old Puritan ideals. A church should stand here beside the school. You never have built a church. You never have allowed a minister to settle here. You never—"

Here Grandma Brown's brother-in-law, Johnny Brown,

spoke. "I've deponed that many a time to this crowd of mavericks! You'd ought to—"

"Keep quiet, Johnny!" ordered Grandma. "Fowler, if you are going to give us a regular Bible sermon, go ahead. Otherwise, I'm going home. I can jaw, myself."

"Also, cuss some, Grandma," suggested a slow voice. Grandma did not heed.

"If you're going to preach, preach," she said to the minister.

Mr. Fowler threw his head back. "Ten years ago I let you drive me out of Lost Chief before I'd preached a sermon. God has never let me rest since, no matter where I was, and when I was re-appointed to Mountain City, before I preached my first sermon there, I came out here. You are going to have the Word of God preached to you to-day if you shoot me for it. And beware lest you come to Esau's fate for ye know how afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully, with tears."

He paused, took a Bible from his pocket and opened it.

Douglas waited tensely. The preacher looked to him as if weighted with mysterious knowledge, as if something infinitely illuminating were to issue from his bearded lips. The boy had a sudden conviction that Fowler was about to say something that would answer the longing that had so oppressed him lately. He hunched his broad, thin shoulders forward, his clear blue eyes on the preacher's face.

Fowler cleared his throat. "'Moreover, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Now thou son of man, wilt thou judge, wilt thou hide the guilty city? Yea, thou shalt show her all her abominations.'"

He closed the Bible. "Friends, this is my message and my text. I am going to show you your abominations of crookednesses. I am going to show you that hell is yawning for such as you."

Douglas sighed. "Old fool!" he muttered. "As Grandma Brown says, she can jaw. He's lost his chance with me." He slipped out of the door, mounted his horse and nodded to the group of youngsters waiting for him. Then he urged Buster up the steps, through the door and up the aisle. The others followed him. A moment later, the schoolroom was chaos. Horses pranced over the desks. Dogs barked and fought among the horses' legs. Babies screamed. Oaths filled the air. Lost Chief rocked with laughter.

Fowler jumped upon the teacher's desk, appealing in dumb show for order. A plunging horse tipped the desk over and the minister went down among the prancing legs. In a moment he was up, and again he raised both hands in a plea for silence. Douglas, laughing gaily, twirled his lariat, and pinioned the two pleading hands, then, amidst shouts of laughter, he backed Buster from the room, drawing the minister none too gently with him.

Outside, whither the crowd quickly followed, Douglas halted and, still laughing, allowed the preacher to free his hands.

"Now go on back to Mountain City, Mr. Preacher," he cried, "and don't come back till you've learned not to scold like an old woman."

Fowler pulled on his overcoat which somebody tossed him, and mounted his horse. Then he stood in his stirrups and pointed a trembling finger at Douglas.

"Ye shall find no place for repentance, though ye seek for it with tears."

"Why should I repent?" demanded Douglas.

"Aw, run him! Run the bastard!" shouted Scott Parsons.

But Doug rode between the preacher and the threatening young rider. "Let him go, Scott. He's had enough!"

Fowler disappeared down the trail. Scott turned scowling toward Douglas, but before he could do more Judith cried, "Come on, everybody! Let's go down to the post-office and get Peter to open the hall for a dance!"

"I will if somebody brings whiskey," agreed Scott, turning his horse toward Swift.

"I'll go over to Inez Rodman's and get some if Maud will go with me," volunteered Judith.

"Let's all go to Rodman's," cried Maud.

The older people were riding slowly down the trail to the valley. The youngsters waited until the way was clear before leaving the school-yard, agreeing in the meantime that Judith and Maud should go after the whiskey while the others went to interview Peter; and the two girls departed forthwith.

"Some one besides me will have to work on Peter," said Scott. "He's sore at me. I tried to kick Sister."

"What did you do that for?" asked Jimmy Day. "Are you sick of living?"

"She bit Ginger on the shoulder. I hate that dog."

"Jude can handle Peter," said Douglas. "Come on, let's get going."

The little cavalcade moved noisily down the trail, crossed the deep snows of Black Gorge and broke into a wild race when the road opened a mile below the post-office. The horses lunged and kicked through the drifts, the dogs barked, the girls squealed, the boys

shouted. The post-office lay in the middle of the valley with neither tree nor house in its vicinity. It was a square log structure, two stories high, originally an inner fort built as a final retreat from the Indians. The upper room was now used as a dance-hall. The lower floor contained the post-office, a general store, and Peter Knight's living quarters.

Peter Knight was the only outsider in Lost Chief. He had lived there a scant twenty years. No one knew whence he came, nor why. He was a man of education and an ardent lover of animals, a somewhat sardonic, very lonely man, yet somehow having more influence in the valley than any one save Grandma Brown. He showed no actual fondness for any particular person save Judith and his big mongrel wolf-hound, Sister, Sister being every inch a person! Douglas had sometimes thought that Peter showed a real interest in him, but this interest was shown almost entirely by scathing vituperations, so the boy made no attempt to form the interest into friendship.

The crowd of riders drew up at the post-office, sparks and snow flying, just as Maud and Judith lashed their horses in from the west trail. Judith waved a bottle of whiskey.

"Some providers!" cried Scott, putting out his hand for the flask. He took a pull, then passed it on. Boys and girls alike took a drink, then Scott pocketed the bottle. During this procedure, the door of the post-office opened and Peter Knight appeared.

He was about forty-five years old, very tall, very, very thin, and as straight as he was thin. Thick, closely clipped gray hair stood up straight from his forehead. His eyes were deep sunk in his head and a piercing, light blue. He possessed a belligerent chin below an obstinate

lower lip and a close-cropped gray mustache. He wore a gray flannel shirt and blue denim pants turned high over riding-boots.

He watched the passing of the whiskey bottle without comment.

"Hello, Peter!" called Judith. "Will you open the hall and let us have a dance?"

"What have you been doing to your horse, Jude?" demanded Peter, eying the panting and dejected Swift.

"Nothing!"

"Nothing! I tell you what, the way you little devils treat your horses would draw tears out of a coyote. Starving 'em, beating 'em, running 'em! You ought to be thrashed, every one of you worthless young slicks."

Curiously enough, none of the group which had shown so much temerity in man-handling the preacher now attempted to reply to Peter. A great shaggy gray dog, exactly like a coyote except that she was much larger, now appeared in the door beside the postmaster. A chorus of growls and whines immediately arose from the dogs congregated among the horses.

"What happened at the schoolhouse?" asked Peter abruptly.

"You're always preaching, yourself; I suppose that's why you didn't attend," grinned Scott Parsons.

"My Yankee horse is sick," said Peter, "and I couldn't leave him. How did it go?"

"We ran him out," laughed Douglas. "We gave him a chance to give us real talk but he couldn't come across, so we roped him and ran him."

"I thought that would happen. Poor Fowler!" Peter's voice was grave.

"Listen, Peter," cried Judith, "I want to ask you a favor."

She mounted the steps and stood before the man. She was as thin as he and as straight. Peter looked down at her, still scowling.

"Now, Peter, listen! You know I love Swift and wouldn't hurt her for anything."

"Wouldn't hurt her! Haven't I told you a hundred times that running a horse through drifts like you do ruins 'em? No, don't try to soft-soap me, Judith! When you kids want a favor from me, don't come up with your horses dripping sweat in below zero weather."

He jerked Sister back into the building and slammed the door.

Judith turned. "Well, we can all go over to Inez' place. She asked us."

"Who's there?" demanded Doug.

"Nobody. She says we can dance if we want to."

There was a silence, broken after a moment by Jimmy Day. "You can't go, Maud."

"I am going if you do!" exclaimed Maud. "Make him let me go, Doug."

"What's the use of being so fussy about poor old Inez?" asked Scott. "What harm is there in a dance at her place?"

"I don't see why, if my mother don't stop me, yours should stop you," protested Judith.

"O, your mother couldn't boss a day-old calf!" said Jimmy impatiently.

"Don't you knock my mother!" shrilled Judith.

"Your mother—" began Maud.

"Dry up, Maud, or I'll smack your mouth!" ordered Douglas.

"No you won't!" cried Jimmy.

"I will, anybody that says anything against Jude's mother," returned Douglas promptly.

"Aw, if you folks are going to start fighting, as usual, I'm going home," growled Scott Parsons. "Every time the crowd gets together, Jude has to start a scrap. It's getting god-awful cold, anyhow, and I've got chores to do." He spurred Ginger and was off.

"Same here!" chimed half a dozen voices, and more horses were spurred away.

Douglas glared at Judith. "Always making trouble! I should think you'd get sick of it."

"Let 'em not knock my mother, or my horse, or my dog, then," replied Judith, tossing her head.

"Your dog! Prince is my dog, miss, and don't you forget it for a minute," cried Douglas.

He spurred Buster onto the main trail which lifted gradually toward Dead Line Peak. Judith, after a pouting moment, followed him.

Except for this steady lift from seven thousand feet at Black Gorge to eight thousand feet at the base of Dead Line and Falkner's Peaks, the valley was as level as a floor. The sun was setting as the two left the post-office. Lost Chief Range, on their right, was black against fire. The snow of the valley was as blue as indigo. A gentle but bitterly cold wind rose from the east. Prince, yelping, set off after a skulking coyote. When he had disappeared beyond a distant herd grazing through the snow, Judith pushed her horse up beside Buster.

"Doug, am I any scrappier than the rest of them?"

Douglas, his cigarette hanging negligently from a corner of his mouth, nodded.

"Well, I have to be, Doug," insisted Judith.

"No, you don't. You just look for trouble, all the time. Why do you have to be?"

"Who is there to look out for me?" demanded the girl, chin in the air.

"Pshaw! You don't need a guard, do you? Besides, what's the matter with me?"

"Huh! You don't really care what happens to me. I'm not your real sister and you never forget it. I'm lonely."

Douglas gave her a curious glance. Was she, he wondered, experiencing that feeling of loneliness and longing which had been haunting him for months? He wanted to ask her about it but he could not. She laughed at him too easily.

They rode on in silence for a while, Judith's thin young body sagging dejectedly in the saddle. The lavendar twilight was gathering. White stars hung within hand touch. Prince returned to the trail and a coyote barked derisively from beyond an alfalfa stack.

"Douglas," exclaimed Judith suddenly, "if I thought when I got married, my husband would treat me like Dad does Mother, I'd never get married. Getting married in real life isn't a bit like the books show it."

Douglas grunted. "I wouldn't worry about getting married for a few years yet."

"I'm fourteen," returned Judith. "I've got a right to think about it. Don't you ever?"

"No."

"You think about girls, though," insisted Judith.

"That isn't thinking about marrying, is it?"

"What do you think about mostly, Doug?"

Douglas sighed. "It's hard to say. I've been awful sad lately. I don't know why. I think about that and I plan a lot about what I'm going to do when I finish school."

"Would you like to marry Maud Day?"

"Who's talking about marrying!" shouted Doug with

sudden and overwhelming exasperation. "What makes you such a fool, Jude?"

"How can I help talking about it when it's my mother your father's so rough with. Of course, you don't care."

"I do, too, care. I think a lot of her, but he don't mean half he says."

"Well, he'd better begin to stop knocking me around when he's mad, or I'll run away."

"Especially in the winter, I suppose," sniffed Douglas, "when it would be plain suicide."

"I don't care if it's in a blizzard," insisted Judith. "When I've had enough, I'll go."

Douglas laughed. "Hanged if I don't think you would, too, Jude. You've got the nerve of a wolverine."

"I hope Dad's tooth is better," said Judith, as dim buildings and a lighted window shone though the dusk.

"Are you really afraid of Dad?" asked Douglas suddenly.

"No," replied Judith, thoughtfully, "but sometimes I hate him."

"I think he's a pretty good old scout in spite of his temper," said the boy.

"Well," admitted Judith, "I guess I do too. At least, I can see why so many women like him. He's awful good-looking. I can see that now I'm growing up."

"Growing up!" mocked Douglas.

But before Judith could pick up the gauntlet, the horses came to pause before the lighted window. Judith jumped from Swift, unsaddled her and turned her into the corral. Then she went hurriedly into the house. Douglas unsaddled more slowly, and strode toward the sheds where calves were bellowing and cows lowing.

For half an hour he worked in the starlight, throwing alfalfa to the crowding stock. It was so cold that by the

time he had finished he scarcely could turn the door-knob with his aching fingers. He entered the kitchen.

It was a large room, with the log walls neatly chinked and whitewashed. An unshaded kerosene lamp burned on the big table in the middle of the room. Judith was cutting bread. The air was heavy with smoke from frying beef. A tall, slender woman, with round shoulders, stood over the red-hot stove, stirring the potatoes. She was a very beautiful, very worn edition of Judith, though one wondered if she ever burned with even a small portion of Judith's eager, wistful fires. She turned as Douglas came in and gave him a quick smile.

"Cold, Douglas?" she asked.

The boy nodded. "Where's Dad?"

"In the other room. His tooth still aches, I guess."

"Is he sore because I'm late?" asked the boy, scowling.

Judith answered with a curious jerking of her breath. "He tried to kick me. I hate him!"

Douglas grunted and marched through the inner door into the one other room of the house. It was at least twenty-five feet square. The log walls were whitewashed like the kitchen and from one of the huge pine rafters hung a lamp which shed a pleasant light on a center table. Beds occupied three corners of the room. There were several comfortable rocking-chairs, a big mahogany bureau and a sewing-machine. Over the double bed hung an ancient saber and over a low bookcase was a framed sampler. There were several good old-fashioned engravings and some framed lithographs with numerous books and piles of dilapidated magazines. Doug's father stood by the table with a book in his hand.

John Spencer at forty-six was still a superb physical specimen, standing six feet two in his felt slippers. His face, so like, yet so unlike his son's, showed heavy lines

from the nostril to the corner of the mouth. Beneath his eyes were faint pouches. The thick thatch of yellow hair had lost its yellow light and now was drab in tone. His flannel shirt, unbuttoned at the throat, showed a strong neck, and the rider's belt that circled the top of his blue denim pants outlined a waist as slim and hard as Doug's.

He looked up. "What do you mean by coming in at this hour, you young hound?"

"I think I might have Sunday afternoon to myself," said Douglas sulkily.

"So do I. But that don't mean you are to have all Sunday night, too. Did you feed the calves?"

"Yes."

"Next Sunday you be here by five o'clock, understand?"

"Yes."

"Supper's ready!" called Judith.

The table was covered by a red-checked cloth. A huge platter of fried beef, another of fried potatoes, another of baking-powder biscuits, and a pot of coffee steamed on the table. John did not speak until his first hunger had been satisfied. When he received his second cup of coffee, however, he said, "Well, my tooth's better. What happened this afternoon, children?"

Judith did not reply, but Douglas, with a chuckle, told the story of Mr. Fowler's discomfiture. John and Mary shouted with laughter.

"By old Sitting Bull, it serves him right!" John wiped his eyes. "What became of him?"

"O, he beat it for the Pass!" replied Douglas.

"What did you do after that?" inquired Mrs. Spencer.

"We went up to the post-office to get Peter to let us

have a dance, but there was nothing doing. He just gave us all a jaw because our horses were sweating."

"I'll bet Swift was the worst off," chuckled John.

"That's right! Pick on me!" cried Judith.

"Judith! Be careful!" protested her mother.

"Let her alone, Mary." John's blue eyes twinkled as he watched the young girl. "She's kept out of a row about as long as she can without choking."

"Some day, when you least expect it," said Judith with a little quiver in her voice, "I'm going to run away."

The others laughed.

"Where to, Jude?" asked her stepfather.

"To some place where folks like me."

"I like you, Jude!" protested John.

Judith turned to him quickly. "Why do you thrash me and kick me, then?"

"Kids have to be trained, and you are as hard bitted as Buster," answered John.

"No such thing!" Judith suddenly rose from the table. "It's just bad temper."

"Judith! Judith! Don't!" pleaded her mother.

"Let her alone!" John's voice was not angry. He was eying Judith with inscrutable gaze.

"The next time you even try to kick me, I'm going to run away."

She paused and suddenly Douglas thought, "Jude knows what real loneliness is. She's a very lonely person." He leaned forward and watched her with unwonted sympathy. She swallowed once or twice, and then went on:

"A woman, a dog, and a horse, you don't kick any of them. Peter Knight says so. Maud Day's father never kicks her. He hits her with a belt, maybe, when she

doesn't get his horse quickly enough, and maybe he hits her mother when he's drinking, but that's all." Judith began to gather up the dishes with trembling fingers.

"How old are you, Judith?" asked John.

"You know. I was fourteen last spring."

"By jove, you are almost a woman grown!" John swept her with a look, then rose and went into the living room.

Douglas followed him and, sitting down on the edge of his bed, he unbuckled his spurs. John settled himself under the lamp with his book, but he did not begin to read at once.

"Yes, Doug, that girl is a woman now and she has any woman in Lost Chief beaten for beauty and nerve."

Douglas gave his father a startled glance; then he said, with elaborate carelessness, "Rats! She's just a fighting kid!"

John chuckled. "I'm glad you're still only a sixteen-year-old fool, Doug."

The boy said nothing more. He scowled and sat staring at his father long after that strenuous person was absorbed in his book. Then he kicked off his boots, pulled off his vest and trousers and crawled into bed. Not long after, Mrs. Spencer came in, glanced at her husband, sighed wearily, then she too went to bed. Judith finished wiping the dishes, sauntered in to the center table and shortly was absorbed in "Bleak House." Mrs. Spencer was snoring quietly and Douglas had not stirred for an hour when he heard his father say in a low voice:

"Jude, old girl, I'm never going to lay finger on you again."

Jude gave a little gasp of surprise. "What's happened, Dad?"

"You've happened! By jove, you've grown to be a beautiful woman!"

"Huh! Doug says I'm a homely, pug-nosed outlaw."

"Doug's a fool kid. It takes a man like me that knows women to appreciate you, Jude."

"Doug'll hear you," warned the girl.

"He's been dead for an hour. Give me a kiss, Judith."

"I don't think I will, I'm too sleepy and tired. Guess I'll go to bed!" She rose, dropping "Bleak House" as she did so.

Mrs. Spencer woke with a start. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing! I just dropped a book." Judith retired to her own corner and shortly she too was asleep.

But Douglas, new thoughts surging through his brain, lay awake long after his father had turned out the light and crawled in beside Mary. Of a sudden, he had seen Judith through his father's eyes and he found himself very unwilling to permit John to see her so. Her loneliness had assumed an entirely new aspect to him. It was the loneliness of girlhood, of girlhood without father, mother, or brother. That was what it amounted to, he told himself. He never had been a real brother to Judith, never had looked out for her as if she had been his sister. And Jude's mother! Just tired and sweet and broken, about as well fitted to cope with her fiery daughter as with the unbroken Morgan colt which was John's pride. As for his father—! Douglas turned over with a deep breath. Let his father take heed! Judith! Judith with her glowing wistful eyes, her crimson cheeks, her dauntless courage, her vivid mind! Judith, with her loneliness, was his to guard from now

on. Funny how a guy could feel so all of a sudden! Funny, if he really should love old Jude, with her fiery temper and more fiery tongue. And if this were love, love was not so comfortable a feeling, after all. It was a profound uneasiness, that uprooted every settled habit of his spiritual being. It was, he told himself, before he fell asleep, a funny thing, love!

CHAPTER II

OSCAR JEFFERSON

"Help those that need help."
—*Grandma Brown.*

THE next morning while Doug was feeding in the corral, his father hitched a team to the hay wagon. Just as he prepared to climb over the wheel, Judith came out, ready for her ride to the Days' ranch, where she was to spend the day.

"Say, Jude," called John. "I want Doug to go to the old ranch after some colts. You come with me and help feed. I'm going to get all I can out of you two until school begins again."

Judith crossed silently to the wagon and climbed aboard. Douglas dropped his pitchfork and walked deliberately toward the fence. As he climbed it, he said, "Judith, you aren't going. You keep your date with Maud." He dropped from the fence to his father's side.

John turned to him with a look of entire astonishment.

"Jude's growing up, as you say," explained Douglas heavily. "If you aren't going to look out for her, I am."

"O, you are! And why?" demanded his father.

"Because!" replied Doug. "Jude, you get down and get started on Swift."

Astonishment, amusement, anger, pursued their way

across the older man's face. Judith put out her tongue at her brother.

"Chase yourself, Doug Spencer! You're not my boss, you bet!"

John put his foot on the hub. "Good-by, Doug; I hope you recover from your insanity by to-night."

Douglas put an unsteady hand on his father's shoulder. "She can't go with you, Dad!"

His father struck him roughly aside. Douglas ran around the wagon. Judith was sitting on the edge of the rick. He reached up, pulled her into his arms, ran her into the feed shed, turned the key in the padlock and put the key in his pocket. As he turned, his father met him with a blow between the eyes. Mary Spencer appeared on the door-step, pale and silent.

It was but the work of a moment to subdue the boy, and to unlock the door.

"Get into the wagon, Judith!" ordered John.

Douglas strode uncertainly to his father's side. "Judith, you go get on your horse!"

The young girl stood staring at the two, something impish in the curl of her lips, something wistful and unafraid and puzzled in her beautiful gray eyes. Back of the two men lay the unblemished blue white of the snow-choked fields and in awful proximity to these, Dead Line Peak flung its head against the cloudless heavens. Judith looked from the Peak to father and son as though deliberately appraising them. John, with ashen hair, with bloodshot eyes and the tell-tales lines from nose to lip corner, but handsome, dominating, choleric, with his reputation as a conqueror of women, as a subduer of horses, as a two-gun man. Douglas, with his thatch of gold blowing in the cold morning air, thin, awkward, only a boy but with a spirit glowing in

his blue eyes that Judith never before had seen there. The girls of Lost Chief were sophisticated almost from the cradle. Judith could interpret the lines in her stepfather's face. But she did not know what the strange light in Douglas' eyes might mean. Suddenly she sprang to Swift's back and put her to the gallop.

"You know what to expect when you come back, miss!" roared John.

But Judith did not seem to hear. Spencer turned to his son. "Now, sir, you go into the house and get the whip!"

Douglas did not stir. "You aren't going to whip me any more, Dad. If you want to fight me, put up your fists."

Mary Spencer ran through the snow toward the two. "Don't fight him, John! Don't! He's just a child!"

John whirled at her with his fists raised. Douglas jumped before his stepmother and caught the blow on his raised elbow.

"And that'll be about enough of that, too, Dad!"

John caught his breath, then poured out a string of oaths and invectives, ending with, "Now before I thrash the cussedness out of you, young fellow, what excuse have you got to put up?"

"I haven't any." Douglas was still pale and his voice broke, childishly. "Only, all of a sudden it seems cowardly to me for you to hit Mother. She's not a child. You haven't got the excuse that you're training her. And you know she can't hit you. You're a good fighter, but I notice you don't hit Peter Knight or Charleton Falkner, any time they peeve you a little. It was all right to lick me and Jude when we were little. But now I warn you. I'm going to hit back. And you got to leave Judith and her mother alone."

John Spencer stood staring at his son. Twice he raised his heavy fist to strike him. Twice he dropped it. Douglas, still pale and trembling, wondered at his own temerity. He always had been so terribly afraid of his father!

"So you don't intend to obey me any more!" sneered John.

"Sure I do," replied Douglas. "Only I'm not going to be licked into doing things blind, and I'm going to take care of Jude."

John uttered a contemptuous oath.

Doug swallowed with an effort but his steady temper was well under control and he went on, "I'd like to be as good a rider and rancher as you are and handle a gun as good as you do, but I'm hanged if I want my woman to be as scared of me as Mother is of you."

"Think yourself a man, eh? Well, I'll tell you, young fellow, as long as you live in that house, there, you'll obey and take the lickings I give you. My father built that house and I was born in it and so were you. He-men come from our breed and only a sissy refuses to obey. I may not be as well educated as my ancestors back East were, but I'm just as well trained as any of 'em and you're going to be too. We Spencers boss our own households. Go get me that whip!"

"No, sir, I won't do it," replied Douglas, a steady burning light in his eyes.

"You mean you'll stand up to me and fight after you saw the way I could handle you a few minutes ago?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

For a long moment there was silence, while Mrs. Spencer twisted her hands together and Doug and his

father stared at each other. Then John gave a short laugh.

"By Sitting Bull! if you haven't got nerve, Doug! Go saddle Buster and get up to the old ranch after those three-year-olds." Then he climbed into the hay wagon, shouted at the team and was off.

Douglas' lips parted. The color returned to his face. Then he sat down weakly on the lower bar of the buck fence and burst into tears, and he was more frightened by his own tears than he had been by his father's anger. Mary Spencer knelt in the snow before him and tried to pull his head to her shoulder.

"Doug! Doug! You are a man!" she whispered. "You are a man!"

Douglas struggled heavily with the strangling sobs and after a moment sat erect and embarrassed.

"Douglas, what happened? How did you come to do it?"

"Something he said to Jude last night scared me," mumbled Doug.

Mary tightened her hold on the boy's arm. "I've been so afraid! So afraid! And no one to talk to!"

"Haven't you ever warned Jude about it?" demanded Douglas, with a sudden sensing of a debt mothers owed to daughters that Mary might not be discharging.

Mary shrank. "O, I couldn't, Doug!"

Douglas looked at her scornfully. "I don't see why that isn't your job."

Mary rose from her knees. She twisted her work-scarred hands together and looked at the boy with pathetic wistfulness.

"Don't you see, Doug, that I couldn't make her understand? She's still such a child she'd just laugh at me."

"Child!" scoffed Douglas, forgetting his own previous estimate of Judith. "She knows a whole lot more than you do!"

Mary laughed drearily. "Now you're talking like a child!" Then her voice cleared with unwonted purposefulness. "No one who hasn't been married can possibly understand men, or fear them or despise them, like they ought to be feared and despised. When I think what I was before I married and what I am now, I feel like I wanted to put Judith where she never could see a man. It's not right that a woman should suffer so. It's not right to lose all your dreams like I've lost mine. Marriage was never meant to be so."

Douglas scowled in his astonishment. Mary had been feeling like this all along when he'd been thinking of her as without nerve! Here, then, was somebody else lonely, like himself and Judith.

"I'm sorry, Mother," he said awkwardly. "I'll do what I can to change it."

"You can't do anything, my dear. What I'm suffering is in the nature of things."

"Well, anyhow, you ought to warn Jude," repeated Douglas.

"I can't!" said Mary. "Doug, if I do she'd guess how cowardly I am and how I suffer—in my mind, I mean," and she put her hands over her face with a dry sob.

Douglas put his long young arm about her. "I'll take care of it for you," he said huskily. "Judith don't know it but she's got somebody besides old Peter ridin' herd on her now. And you know I'm some little old herder, Mother!"

"I know you're a man!" exclaimed Mary. "The kind of a man that's mighty scarce in Lost Chief Valley." She turned away toward the house.

Douglas picked a bridle from the fence and started after Buster.

It was nearly supper time and Doug and his father were reading in the living-room when Judith returned. The wind had risen and fine particles of snow sifted under the eaves and over the table. The wood stove glowed red hot and the smell of cedar mingled with that of frying beef in the kitchen.

Judith, without waiting to take off her mackinaw, cheeks scarlet, eyes brilliant, stood before her father.

"Here I am, Dad."

John looked up from his book. "Have you milked yet?"

"No, sir."

"Go out and do it."

"I want to know if you're going to lick me, Dad?"

"What did I promise you, last night?" he demanded.

"Do you mean to keep that promise?" asked Judith.

"Go out and tend to your milking!" roared John, rising to his feet and throwing the book across the room. "Get out of my sight, you little fool, you blankety-blank—" But Judith had fled and Douglas retired to the kitchen.

Supper was a silent affair. But that evening when the family had gathered under the lamp to read, Douglas said, "Scott Parsons wants me to take the mail stage for him Wednesday."

"Where's he going?" asked John.

"Out after his registered bull. It's strayed again."

"Huh!" grunted John. "Are he and Oscar Jefferson still fighting over that bull?"

"I guess so," replied Douglas. "Can I go, Dad?"

"It will put the dehorning off another day, but I guess you can go. That extra money will come in handy.

How would you like to drive the mail regularly next winter, Douglas?"

The boy tossed "Treasure Island" on the table. "Do you mean you'd let me have it?"

"What would you do with the money?"

Douglas hesitated.

Judith spoke. "I know what I'd do. I'd put half the money into books. The other half I'd use to buy me some buckers and I'd go into training as a lady bronco buster."

Everybody laughed, and Mrs. Spencer said, "You won't have time to keep your nose in a book if you start in that line, Judith!"

"I'll always read," retorted Judith loftily.

"I'd buy me a silver-mounted saddle and silver spurs," said Douglas, "and that dapple gray of Oscar Jefferson's and a good greyhound, and I'd go into the wild horse catching business."

John groaned. "We've sure-gawd got an ambitious pair of kids here, Mary! What about the money you get from this trip, Doug?"

"Will you let me keep it?" asked Douglas, eagerly.

"I'll see!" John picked up his book again.

"Let me go with you, Doug!" pleaded Judith.

"Nothing doing!" exclaimed her stepfather succinctly. "You go to bed now before you get me aggravated."

Judith tossed her head but obediently retired to her corner of the room, undressed and crawled into her bed. Douglas was not long in following her example.

It was about eight o'clock Wednesday morning and twenty below zero when the mail buckboard driven by Douglas took the rising trail from Black Gorge eastward over the Mesa Pass. The snow was heavy and the trail only indifferently opened. To add to the difficulties,

Scott had hitched Polly, a half-broken mule, to the stage in place of the mare who had gone lame. James, the remaining horse, was steady, however, and Douglas had only a moderate amount of trouble until the long steep grade up to the Pass began. Here, after a quarter of an hour of reluctant going, the mule balked. James did what he could to pull her along, Douglas plied the blacksnake; but to no avail. When she finally did move it was to lie down with deliberate slowness. Douglas jumped out into the drifts and by risking his life among her agitated legs he managed to get her up. An hour passed in the intense cold before she finally was harnessed and meekly pulling more than her share.

At the top of the Pass, Douglas drew up to breathe the team. Bleak, snow-covered rocks rose on either side of the trail, but opening beyond, snow-topped ranges in rainbow tints gleamed against a sky of intensest blue. Behind him, as he turned to look, lay Lost Chief Valley, with blue clouds rolling from the tops of Dead Line and Falkner's Peaks. Douglas shivered and urged the team on. But the mule again balked, and as Doug gathered up the whip a gruff voice cried, "Hold up your hands!"

A six-shooter in a mittened fist appeared over a rock heap at the roadside.

Douglas blanched, then looked keenly at the mitten. "Come out of that, Jude! Darn it, I thought you'd gone to Grandma Brown's!"

Judith led Swift from behind the rock, and mounted. Her eyes were bright with mischief.

"You turn right round and go home again, miss!" he cried, as Swift ranged beside the buckboard.

Judith giggled. "You sure do need a hazer, Doug, while you're driving that mule! I left a note for Mother."

"Go home! Don't speak to me. This is no trip for a girl!"

"You mean you want me to go home and help Dad feed the two-year-olds?" demanded Judith.

Douglas glared at her. For all the biting cold, her old knit cap was hanging to the pommel, her mackinaw was open at the throat. Her cheeks were deep scarlet, her gray eyes half filled with tears.

Douglas scrowled and his mouth settled into sullen lines. This was a man's trip. Judith had no business to make it seem easy enough for a girl! And with this new feeling for Judith, she was making the adventure too difficult. Hang it all! The place for a girl was at home! But he knew Jude and he was not going to try to repeat the triumph of Monday morning. He called to the team and started on.

Judith, having won her point, dropped behind the buckboard and the journey continued in silence. They reached the half-way cabin late in the afternoon. The little log hut, with a rude horse shelter beside it, stood in a clump of cedar close beside the trail. The snow was fresh trampled, for the up stage had left at three o'clock. Judith and Douglas were very cold. They hastily unharnessed, broke the ice at the little spring and watered the horses, then rushed into the cabin. There was a bunk, covered by soiled and ragged quilts, a table, a few cooking utensils, and boxes for seats. They lighted a candle and unearthed canned beans, coffee, and canned brown bread from beneath the bunk. After he had eaten his supper, Doug grinned for the first time.

"Forgiven me, huh?" asked Judith.

Douglas nodded. "It would be darned lonely without you. You'd better get to bed, Jude."

"Who gets the bunk?" asked Judith.

"You of course!" Douglas' voice was suddenly harsh again.

Judith sat down on the edge of the bunk. In the uncertain light of the candle she looked all eyes.

"Doug, what is the matter lately? I never know when you're going to take my head plumb off."

"Oh, shut up, can't you! I don't see why girls can't let a fellow alone!"

"Tell me, Doug: Why did you keep me from going with Dad on Monday morning?"

Douglas straightened up, his back to the stove, scowled, sighed, then said, "I feel like I wanted you to be like the girls in books and not like these wild women round here. And if you don't know what I mean, you are a fool."

"Douglas Spencer, you know I'm just as good as any girl that ever lived in any book!"

"I know that, and I propose to keep you so." Doug lighted a cigarette.

"Since when were you so interested, I'd like to know?"

"That is none of your business. Only, from now on you toe the mark, miss."

"You're not my boss, Doug Spencer!"

"Yes, I am," returned Douglas serenely. He finished making up a bed on the floor, rolled himself in two of the quilts and pulled the corner of one over his head.

Judith put out her tongue at his muffled form and crept under the quilts that remained on the bunk. By and by the moonlight appeared through the window. The stove grew cold. The howling of the coyotes circled nearer and nearer. Suddenly a rifle-shot rung out, then another. The shots did not waken the sleeping boy and girl, but the mule brayed and began to

kick with the rapidity of machine-gun fire. They both jumped up and ran out. The mule was just disappearing across the trail. Douglas jumped on Swift's bare back, catching the lariat from the saddle that lay on the manger.

"I'll come too, on James!" cried Judith. "I'll ride to the right!"

Douglas urged Swift through the drifts, circled a cedar grove, and saw the mule stop to sniff at a horse which stood beside a dark heap in the snow. Judith appeared around the opposite side of the grove and the mule dashed away. They both hurried toward the quiet heap on the ground. A man lay in the drifts, his rifle beside him. It was Oscar Jefferson, with blood running out of his temple into the snow.

"Is he dead?" whispered Judith, crowding James up against Swift.

"I guess so. Must have been the shot that scared the mule. Come on, Judith! We've got to get him into the cabin, somehow."

Judith began to cry. "I couldn't touch a dead man, Douglas!"

Douglas' own lips were very uncertain in the moonlight but he answered, firmly enough, "We've got to do it. The coyotes will get him here."

"They'll say we shot him!" sobbed Judith.

Doug gave a start. "They sure-gawd will! What shall we do, Jude?"

"Go off and leave him and say nothing about it."

"With our horses' tracks all round him! You're crazy! Anyhow, we couldn't go off and leave a neighbor like this. 'Tisn't Lost Chief manners."

"All right." Jude wiped her eyes on her sleeve. "Let's put the lariat round his feet and let Jeff's horse

pull him to the cabin. It won't hurt him in the soft snow."

"Nothing will hurt him any more, poor old Jeff," said Douglas.

He dismounted and moved toward the body. Then, with teeth chattering audibly, he tied the lariat round Jeff's feet and told Jude to get on to the saddled horse.

"Guide him easy. I'll walk and lead the other horses and see that nothing goes wrong."

Still whimpering, Judith obeyed, and the strange little procession moved toward the cabin. When they reached the shed, Doug loosened the lariat. "Judith," he said, "the best thing we can do is to put him in the buckboard and take him home."

"I'm so afraid of a dead man, Doug!"

"So am I. But it's only poor old Oscar, after all, who's been our next-door neighbor all our lives. We can't leave him here alone, like a dead horse. We'll take him home. That's what Dad or any of the men would do. Come on, Jude."

They established poor Oscar on the floor of the buckboard, among the mail bags. They hitched up James and Oscar's big black, and tied Swift to the tail end. All this time the moon shone coldly on the white hills, and the coyotes howled nearer and nearer.

"Cover him deep with the quilts, Doug," whispered Judith. "I'm going to make up a pot of hot coffee, before we start."

"How about that mule?" whispered Douglas.

"Let it go plumb to hell!" returned Judith. "Scott's the one should have been shot, for sending you out with such a brute!"

"If it hadn't been for the mule, we'd never have found him," muttered Douglas.

It was not much after eleven when the two, huddled together on the seat of the buckboard, started back for Lost Chief. The cold was so intense that they were obliged to take turns driving. When the road permitted, they walked until even their hardy lungs demanded rest. Then they huddled together again, their knees touching the dashboard, lest Oscar's poor dead feet should thrust against theirs.

They talked very little except to guess as to the probable name of the murderer. Toward dawn, when the moon had set and Douglas was trusting the trail to the horses, he said:

"Do you remember at the schoolhouse Sunday, when Charleton said he didn't believe in a hereafter, old Jeff chimed in and said, 'Me too'?"

"I remember," replied Judith.

"What do you suppose Jeff thinks about it now?"

"He ain't thinking. He's gone. There's no hereafter. Dad says so." Judith huddled still closer.

"Isn't it horrible!" shuddered Douglas. "Horrible!"

Judith began to cry again. "If there was just a heaven," she sobbed, "I wouldn't mind living or dying either."

"Well, there isn't any." Douglas heaved a great sigh. "I wonder if they hang kids as young as us for murder?"

"Let them try hanging me, just once! That's all I've got to say!" exclaimed Judith stoutly, in spite of her chattering teeth. "The worst I ever did to Oscar Jefferson was to play bucking bronco on that old milch cow, Jinny, of his. And she sure-gawd could buck! But I was only a little girl then and I can prove it."

"Looks as if we might be in real trouble to me!" muttered Douglas.

"It's growing daylight and there's the Pass, at last!" suddenly cried Judith.

Douglas drew a deap breath and urged on the weary horses.

It was full nine o'clock when the team drew up at the post-office door. At Doug's halloo, Peter Knight appeared. Sister crowded out the door past him, pricked her ears forward and ran to sniff at the rear of the buckboard.

"What on earth brings you back at this hour?" demanded Peter.

"Trouble!" Douglas moistened his frost-cracked lips. "Oscar Jefferson was shot last night. We got his body here."

"Who shot him?" asked Peter.

"We don't know."

"Where was it? Here, Sister, get back in the house!" Peter jerked the door wide.

Judith answered. "Up beyond the cedars, across from the half-way house. We found him while we were hunting for that devilish old mule."

Peter looked keenly at the two haggard young faces, then he said, "You two come in and eat and get warm. I'll do some telephoning."

"I want to get home to my mother," half sobbed Judith.

"Sha'n't we take him on to his house?" asked Douglas.

Peter replied impatiently, "You know he was baching it alone while young Jeff's in California. You come as I tell you!"

Stiffly the two stumbled out of the stage and into the warmth of Peter's quarters. He had just begun

his own breakfast and, at his orders, Douglas and Judith devoured it while Peter went to the telephone. In an incredibly short time John Spencer and Frank Day, the sheriff, galloped up to the door. To them and to Peter, the young people told their story.

The sheriff asked a number of questions. After he had finished Douglas queried anxiously:

"You ain't going to try and put it on us, Frank?"

Frank grinned. "Well, I might, if the suspicions I have as to another party prove wrong."

"Don't torture 'em, Frank!" protested Peter. "They've been through a good deal for kids."

"Scott Parsons was the only rider in the valley who didn't like Oscar," said John. "That war they've had for two years over the bull was bound to end in trouble. I warned Oscar."

"Oscar was more to blame than Scott," said the sheriff. "He was the meanest man for hanging out on a fool thing I ever knew. And I'm just as fond of Oscar as the rest of you. What was a bull to Oscar! He could buy a dozen of 'em. Scott hasn't a thing on earth except wages for riding and that mangy little herd of slicks he's picked up."

"Picked up is right!" grunted John. "That bull, whoever it belonged to, is standard bred."

"Scott was born with a nasty temper." Peter spoke thoughtfully. "He told Oscar in front of me he would get him. That was about two weeks ago."

"Did Oscar tell any one he was going anywhere?" asked the sheriff.

"Not me," said Peter. "Why not let the kids go home?"

"Sure," agreed Frank. "You've done a good night's work, you two. Get some sleep now."

"You'll find Buster tied to my saddle, Doug," said John. "Judith, can Swift still move?"

"You bet she can!" replied Judith.

There was a laugh, and the two young people gladly mounted and trotted into the home trail.

Oscar's wife had long been dead. His son was on a cattle buying trip and could not be reached. Oscar had been one of the richest men in the very well conditioned valley, so, instead of taking the body up to the lonely ranch house, it was laid out in state in the post-office.

Grandma Brown always officiated at deaths and births in Lost Chief. After it was found impossible to get in touch with young Jeff and after the sheriff had made a three days' investigation, she ordered the funeral to take place at once.

"We could pack him down in the ice till a thaw opens up the cemetery a little," suggested Charleton Falkner. "You know what a god-awful job it is making a grave in the cemetery in winter, between the frost and the rocks."

"He's going to be buried now, while he's in good trim," declared Grandma. "I'm not going to have him ruined, waiting for spring. You men get to work now, in shifts, like you did for old Ma Day."

Grandma's word was law in Lost Chief, and the grave forthwith was prepared. John Spencer, Peter Knight, and Charleton Falkner were appointed by the old lady to do the work, and Douglas accompanied his father. Old Johnny Brown appeared while the work was in process.

The cemetery was fenced in, but except for a few simple headstones and monuments, it was unadorned.

"Queer the women folks have never fixed this place

up a little," said Peter Knight, standing waist-deep in the grave, with John. "Most places I've been, women keep the graves like they would a little garden."

Charleton Falkner, resting on a neighboring headstone, smiled sardonically. "Lost Chief women have enough to do without dolling up graves."

Cold sweat stood on Doug's forehead. He stared from the gaping grave to the murmuring line of pines that marked the end of the cemetery and the beginning of the Forest Reserve, and shuddered. He had not been sleeping well since the night of the murder. Johnny Brown, small and very thin, with a scraggly iron-gray beard hung with little icicles and his blue eyes watering with the cold, moved away from the headstone against which he had been resting after his turn in the grave.

"That boy," he said, jerking his elbow at Doug, "will be massified for many a year for driving the preacher out of Lost Chief."

"How do you mean—massify!" demanded Doug, gruffly. Johnny might be half-witted, but his remarks were curiously penetrating sometimes.

"I mean massify," grunted Johnny.

Peter Knight heaved a great frosted boulder out to the ground level.

"Charleton," he said slowly, "doesn't the thought of lying in a forgotten grave give you dumb horrors?"

"Sometimes," replied Charleton laconically, as he beat his cold hands together. "But only sometimes."

Douglas strained forward in the intensity of his interest.

Douglas' father straightened his broad shoulders. "If I let myself think about it, I have to go out and get drunk," he muttered.

"You don't conject right about them things," cried Johnny. "You got to listen to things."

No one heeded the sad-faced little man. Peter stooped for another frozen clod. "I'd give my right hand for my mother's faith in a living God," he said.

"But if there isn't any God, what is there?" cried Douglas, with passionate protest in his voice.

"Don't you try to discuss matters you ain't old enough to understand, son," ordered John Spencer.

"Unbelief is the price we pay for scientific progress," said Charleton. "Me, I'm willing to pay."

"I'm not," growled Peter, "but I don't see any way round it. Come on, Johnny, do your share."

"I ain't going to dig any more," declared the little man. "You all say I ain't all here, and the part that ain't here is the part that works. Sabez?"

Everybody laughed.

"And," Johnny went on, seriously, "I ain't sure it's a good idea to plant 'em so deep. It takes a long time to grow up to heaven. It's a gregus far away place."

"Right you are, Johnny, old man," agreed Peter. "It sure is gregus far away."

Nobody urged Johnny to return to the job and the rest of the work was finished in silence.

That afternoon the funeral took place. There were services at the post-office, where any one who wished spoke in praise of the dead man. There were many speeches and it was late afternoon when the funeral cortège reached the cemetery. The Forest Reserve was mysterious with shadows and with the unending murmur of the pines. Snow gleamed blue over the valley. The saddle horses and teams were hitched to the stout fence that surrounded the cemetery, and Lost Chief Valley crowded about the open grave.

John Spencer drove Mary down in the old bobsled but Judith and Douglas rode Swift and Buster as usual. Judith had been nervous and irritable ever since the trip to the half-way house, but she had refused to admit that the murder had anything to do with her state of mind. She had a boyish horror of admitting to fears, mental or physical. She stood opposite Douglas, with a round beaver cap pulled down over her curly hair, her cheeks not so red as usual, her dark eyes rimmed and puzzled. Douglas wondered what she was puzzling over and resolved that after the ceremonies were over, he would ask her.

Douglas could not know with what intensity his deep-set eyes turned from Judith and fastened upon Grandma Brown, who stood at the head of the grave. There was a contented assurance in the old lady's manner that was vaguely comforting to the boy. He wondered what she knew that his father and Peter and Charleton did not know.

As the coffin was lowered into the grave, Grandma said, "Does anybody feel like saying a few last words?"

There was a silence broken only by the murmur of the Forest, then Johnny Brown cleared his throat. "I might say a whole lot of things. I wasn't so goldarned proud of Oscar like the rest of you seemed to be. He had a gregus kind of a temper and oncet—"

Grandma turned on him. "Johnny Brown, ain't you ashamed of yourself!"

"No, I ain't! You say I ain't all here, and the part that I'd be ashamed with is the part that's gone," returned Johnny firmly.

Judith gave an irrepressible snort, then fastened solemn eyes on the sky. A restless clearing of throats

swept the little assemblage; then Grandma, indignation still in her kind old voice, spoke once more.

"Can't any of you men that knew Oscar all his life say something comforting before you close his grave?" she urged. "Then I'll try to do it. I was brought up religious, myself." She lifted her serene old face to the evening sky. "O God, this man wandered far from You like all the rest of us here. But an old woman like me believes You're there and that you know Oscar hadn't a really bad hair in his head. Take his soul, Lord, and be as good to him as You can. I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in me, even though he die, yet shall he have Eternal Life."

The tears were running down many cheeks when the old lady finished. Foolish old Johnny laughed, then he began to sing a hymn in which several of the women joined.

"God be with you till we meet again,
By his counsels guide, uphold you,
With his sheep securely fold you,
God be with you till we meet again."

And so the earthly career of Oscar Jefferson ended.

CHAPTER III

THE GRADUATION DANCE

"Horses, dogs, guns, women, whiskey, the open country of the Rockies—enough for any man."

—Charleton Falkner.

INSTEAD of riding home with Judith, after the ceremony, Douglas, on sudden impulse, took a roundabout way to the post-office, thence toward the Browns' ranch. Dusk was settling in the valley. The quivering aspens along Lost Chief creek were etched gray rose on the deep blue snow. Far to the east a single scarlet mountain-top pierced through the twilight blue. Buster loped swiftly through the swimming landscape.

When he reached the post-office Douglas did not stop but rode on along Black Gulch trail to the Browns'. Grandma, returning by the direct route from the cemetery, had been home for a half-hour before Doug arrived. She was coming out of the cow stable, lantern in hand, when the boy dismounted at the corral. Spurs clanking, brave chaps flapping, Douglas ran to her like a child and caught her apron in his gauntleted hand.

"Grandma! Tell me something! Did you believe what you said at the grave?"

The old lady held the lantern up to his face. "Come into the cow stable out of the wind, Doug."

Within the dim shelter she hung the lantern on a nail and sat down on a box, indicating another to the young rider.

"Yes, I believed it, boy. Didn't you?"

"No, Grandma! And none of the men do that count in this valley. Is it just old woman stuff, like they say?"

"Maybe!" sniffed Grandma.

"And if you believe it," Doug rushed on, "why did you let us run the preacher out?"

"O, the preacher! Pooh! He's nothing but a blankety blank sissy like the rest of the sky pilots!"

"But can't I believe like you do, Grandma? I'm just the unhappiest guy in the world!"

"You mean," the old lady spoke deliberately, "that this is the first funeral you've seen that's set you to thinking and the fear of death is on you for the first time. I hope it'll do you good, Doug. You're an awful rough little devil."

Douglas swallowed audibly. "Grandma," he cried passionately, "how can I get to believe what you do?"

Grandma looked thoughtfully from her plump milch cow to the lantern, and from the lantern to Douglas. "Doug, I don't think you can, living among the folks you do. To have my kind of faith, you've got to have a mother that breeds it in you from the time you're a baby."

Douglas, his face looking absurdly young above his broad shoulders, said despairingly, "I don't believe you want to help me."

"Well," Grandma was still deliberate, "I don't believe a wild young devil like you really wants help. You're just scared."

Douglas rose, drawing himself to his full height. He was deeply offended. "I thought you might understand me!" he exclaimed. He strode out to Buster and galloped home.

It was extremely difficult to find a moment alone with Judith in the two-room cabin; but the chores were late

that night and Judith, instead of helping her mother with the supper preparations, went out to milk, and so Doug's second interview that evening was in the cow shed, for when he reached the home corral, Judith had not finished her task.

This time, he was not precipitate. He sauntered into the little stable with a manner of large leisure.

"Hello, Jude!"

"Hello, Douglas! Finished feeding?"

"No. I just got back. What did you think of the funeral?"

"I'm not thinking of it at all."

"Jude, don't you believe there's any hereafter?"

"Doug, I don't want to talk about it."

"But, Judith, I'm lonely and I've got to talk to some one."

Judith turned an indignant face toward the tall boy. "Don't you suppose I'm lonely, too? What good does talk do? Religion is all right for little kids but you can't believe in fairy tales as you grow up."

"But what can we do?" insisted Douglas, the sweat breaking out above his lips again. "Doesn't the thought of no God, no hereafter, just paralyze you?"

"I tell you," repeated Judith obstinately, "I just don't let myself think about it."

"Then what's made you so cross ever since that night?"

Judith rose and set the brimming milk pail in a feed box. Her eyes, in the lantern light, widened with a horror so devastating that Douglas clutched the manger behind him.

"How did you know? Doug, that's it and there's no place to go for help because there isn't any help for that!"

The sudden revelation of her need roused Douglas. He moistened his lips and said, "We've got to harden ourselves to stand it, like the rest of 'em do. And when it gets too bad we can talk to each other about it. That'll help."

Judith clutched his arm as if she felt the need of touching a human being. Douglas did not stir but as he stood looking down at her a strange aching gladness at her nearness and at her splendid girlhood flooded the horror out of his thought.

"I'll carry the milk pail in for you, Jude," he said.

"Fudge!" she returned scornfully. "As if I hadn't carried it in every night for four years! You'd better do your feeding before Dad gets after you."

Douglas suddenly laughed and went out.

For a day or so he was haunted, particularly after he went to bed, by the thought of the grave scene and by the comments Grandma Brown had made. But Doug was only sixteen, after all, and shortly he was absorbed by other matters: the hunt for Scott Parsons, the preparations for the dehorning, and his new and thrilling and secret feeling toward Judith.

The search for Scott delayed the round-up only for a short time. A day or so after the funeral it snowed and removed the last chance of finding Scott's tracks. The cold was intense, and the job really belonged to Sheriff Frank Day, so the posse broke up after a few days and the dehorning was undertaken.

Early in the morning, half a dozen young riders helped Douglas and Judith to cut out of the great herd in the swamp field the steers in need of dehorning. In proportion to their strength, Lost Chief girls were as clever as the men in handling horses and cattle. Judith was easily the best of them. There was a fire and vim about

her work, a wild grace, that the other girls lacked. Douglas, his vision sharpened by his new attitude toward Judith, thought she never had looked so handsome as she did this morning, in her beaver cap, her new scarlet mackinaw, curls flying, sitting the excited little Swift as easily as a boy.

Out of the circular corral led a smaller one. A cedar fire burned in the middle of the lesser enclosure. John Spencer and two helpers stood near the fire, saws at hand, searing-iron heating, tar-pot simmering. The herd bellowed in the outer corral. The riders, ropes in hand, sat with laughing faces turned toward Judith, who was to rope the first steer. Douglas wished that there were not so many of the riders with admiration in their eyes. Judith sat Swift lightly, edging mischievously now against one rider, now another. Swift bit Buster, who reared while Douglas swore laughingly. Magpies swooped from the blue spruce at the edge of the corral, black and white against pale blue. The cattle, all Herefords, red and white, milled about and lowed and tossed worried heads. The riders, sheepskin chaps flapping, bright neckerchiefs fluttering, shouted and cursed and fingered their lariats. Dogs, yellow dogs, black dogs, gray dogs, spotted dogs, continuously encroached from without the fence and were ordered or lashed away.

Suddenly Swift shot from the group of horses. Judith spun her lariat and a lusty young steer, well back toward the south fence, turned and stumbled. Swift sat back on her haunches, turned as she rose and leaped toward the dehorning corral. The bellowing steer was dragged backward, his left foot securely roped. He fell as they reached the gate and skidded helplessly on his side through the trampled yellow snow.

The men by the fire were ready. One of them perched on the steer's flank and freed the lariat, while another sat astride his neck and amidst a gush of blood sawed off the horns close to the head. John seared the stubs with the hot iron dipped in tar. The poor brute bellowed with fright and pain. Judith recoiled her lariat and made way for Jimmy Day, who slid up with a protesting heifer.

"'Jude!" he shouted. "You're the cow ropingest girl in the Rockies! Say, Jude, ain't you afraid that baa-baa you're riding will buck with you? Swift! What a hell of a name for that thing!"

"She can beat you roping 'em at that, Jimmy!" cried Douglas.

"Better ride light, Jimmy," warned John. "She thinks more of that mare than she does of me."

"All right, John," laughed Jimmy. "Take this heifer, fellows! She thinks she's a moose!"

"She'll think she's a kitten when we finish with her," chuckled John.

There was an uproar now in the two corrals that echoed from mountain to mountain. The trampled snow was crimson. White angora and sheepskin chaps were gaumed with thick clots of blood. The horses, half frantic from the smell of the bleeding cattle, tried every means in their not limited repertoires to bolt the hateful job.

The work had gone fast and furiously for some time when Douglas touched his father on the arm.

"Dad, look up on the shoulder of old Dead Line!"

John straightened his back and shaded his eyes. A rider leading a Hereford was coming down the ridge.

"That's Scott's horse, Grover," said Douglas. "Can you make out the rider?"

"Not yet." John continued to stare intently. Others noticed his posture and followed his gaze.

"It's Scott Parsons!" cried Charleton Falkner.

"Shall we go get him?" exclaimed Jimmy Day.

"No. He's starved out and giving up. Let's hear what he has to say," said John.

The dehorning went on. Half a dozen more bleeding steers had been turned out before Scott, weary, gaunt, haggard beyond words, leading an emaciated young bull, drew rein beside the smaller corral. The roping came to a pause. John twisted a lariat round the neck of a steer he was working on and led it to the fence. The others followed.

"Well, why the committee of welcome?" asked Scott hoarsely. His bloodshot eyes turned from one to another.

"Where'd you find the bull, Scott?" asked John.

"First located him on Fire Mesa. Been round about considerable since."

"Whose bull is it now?" Charleton Falkner pushed Democrat toward the fence.

"Mine!" Scott spoke shortly, his freckled face unmoved.

"Do you think it was worth the price?" demanded Spencer.

Scott looked searchingly at the crowd before him. The steer John was holding had been dehorned but not seared. The blood had run down the brute's white face and formed a crimson icicle on its under lip. John had run his fingers through his ashen hair, leaving it blood-smeared. Charleton was lighting a bloodstained cigarette with the hot searing-iron. Judith pounded her half-frozen fingers together.

"What price did I pay?" asked Scott.

"Doug," commanded John, "you tell your story."

Douglas, with considerable embarrassment and assisted by Judith, told of their trip with the mail stage. Scott listened with little apparent interest. He said nothing when the story was done.

"It's like this, Scott," said John. "It looks like you killed him. You've got a bad temper. So had Oscar. You fought for over a year about that fool bull, first one of you branding it, then the other. You're young and you'd better give yourself up. You'll stand a better chance."

"Go ahead, Scott!" cried Judith. "I'll stand your friend like you did mine when I rode old Oscar's milch cow 'most to death!"

"Shut up, Jude!" exclaimed Douglas.

"Go ahead, Scott," John half smiled. "You needn't worry. You have a friend!"

"A friend won't do him much good, if he's guilty," grunted Charleton Falkner.

"Anybody's better off for at least one friend," repeated Judith stoutly. "Darn it! All of you picking on poor old Scott!"

"Lean on me, Grandpa!" piped Jimmy Day.

Scott's haggard eyes focused on Judith. "I'll hold you to that, Jude! By God, you're the only white man in the valley! I came in to give myself up, Jude. The cold got me. I shot him, after he'd rebranded the bull before my eyes and after he'd given me this."

He ripped open his mackinaw and shirt and tore a rag from his shoulder, disclosing a vivid wound. "I ain't the only one that's quick on the trigger!"

There was a quick murmur among the riders. John and Charleton, the oldest men in the group, looked at each other.

"Charleton, you and Jimmy Day ride to Scott's house with him," said John. "I'll go to the house and telephone to the sheriff." He mounted and rode off.

"Can your horse carry you so far, Scott?" asked Judith.

Scott nodded, with something curiously like tears in his hard hazel eyes. "You take the bull, Jude," he said. "I'd like for you to have him. He's standard bred."

Judith's eyes shone like stars. "If Dad'll only let me! Do you think he will, Doug?"

Douglas shrugged his shoulders. The bull was tied to the fence and Scott rode slowly away with his escort. When John returned from telephoning he gave a grudging consent to Judith's taking the bull, and the dehorning went on. Not until the blue velvet shadow of Falkner's Peak lay heavy on the incarnadined corral and the last bellowing steer had found solace at the haystacks did the riders start homeward. Douglas followed Judith, as she led the scare-crow bull.

"He's a good mate for Swift," he said.

"You're just jealous!" retorted Judith.

"Of what?" demanded Douglas.

"Of me starting a herd before you do!"

"Ha! Ha!" ejaculated Doug, without a smile, and nothing more was said until they reached the house.

At supper that night John asked Judith why she had shown so much friendship for Scott Parsons.

"I was sorry for him," she replied.

"But he killed our old neighbor!" exclaimed John.

"Yes, and Oscar had a notch on his gun, Dad; and you have one on yours."

"We put those notches there in the early days," returned John, "when every cowman carried the law on his

hip. It's different now. You're altogether too highty-tighty, Jude, for a girl. You keep away from Scott Parsons, or I'll make you regret it."

Judith made no reply.

Scott's trial took place in April. It was a matter of deep interest, of course, to Lost Chief, and every one who could get to Mountain City by horse, wagon, or automobile, attended the court sessions. Judith and Douglas were chief witnesses and were royally entertained by young Jeff, who had returned to Lost Chief a week or so after his father's funeral.

Scott was acquitted on the plea of self-defense but he did not return at once to Lost Chief. The attitude of young Jeff did not make an early return seem diplomatic.

Douglas, when he came home from the trial, had a curious feeling that the winter just passed had ended his boyhood. He did not know why. He was not old enough to realize that when the fires of desire and the fear of death begin to sear a boy's mind, adolescence is passing and manhood has all but arrived.

Judith, who had accomplished her fifteenth birthday in March, a day or so before Doug arrived at the dignity of seventeen, had changed too. She had been less profoundly affected by the murder than Douglas; not that she was less sensitive or intelligent than he, but she was far less introspective than her foster-brother. And Judith had two unfailing foods for all hungers of the mind. One was her love of reading, the other, her love of riding; both absorbing, to the elimination of self investigation.

Douglas read a great deal, himself. Books and magazines furnished the only mental stimulants in the valley and it was a surprisingly well-read community. But

Douglas, caring for Judith as he did, found it impossible to become fully absorbed in his old pastimes. He was restless, moody and lonely as only youth can be.

He and Judith both graduated from the log school early in June. There was the usual graduation dance at the post-office at which, as usual, Peter Knight officiated. It was a heavenly moonlit night. The air was fragrant from the acres of budding alfalfa and full of the lift and tingle that can belong to June only in the high altitudes. The ever strong, steady west wind of Lost Chief summers swirled down the valley.

The hall was dimly lighted by a single kerosene lamp. Cigarette smoke mingled with the pungent smell of whiskey, which seemed to be the chief ingredient of a concoction in a large pail, under the lamp. In the corner opposite the pail was a phonograph over which Peter presided.

Everybody danced. Even the dogs were not prohibited the floor. Only when Sister started a fight with Prince did any one protest and the dogs were driven back, temporarily, under the benches.

The schoolgirls in their white dresses were, of course, the belles of the occasion. Lost Chief, living its intensive life of isolation, probably did not realize of what superb physique were the youngsters of its third generation. Jimmy Day devoted himself to Little Marion Falkner, aged fourteen. Marion was called little to distinguish her from her mother, also Marion. The daughter at fourteen was five feet ten inches in height, the mother an inch taller. Even a badly cut muslin dress could not fully conceal the fine breadth of Little Marion's shoulders nor the splendid length and straightness of her legs.

Jocelyn Brown, Grandma's grand-daughter, dancing

frequently with Charleton Falkner, was at twelve only slightly shorter than Little Marion. She had the face of an angel, the vocabulary of a cowman, and was built of steel.

Inez Rodman, very fair and slender, easily five feet nine, was scorned by the older women but was brazenly popular with their husbands and the younger set of boys and girls.

Judith danced all the time but only occasionally with Douglas, who took her to task for her neglect.

"But, Doug, you and Dad are no novelty to dance with. What's the matter with you anyhow? You never used to want to dance with me."

"I'm just trying to keep you from dancing with all these roughneck riders." Douglas' chin was in the air above his bright blue silk neck scarf.

Judith's eyes swept him appraisingly. His white silk shirt hung loose on his thin, fine shoulders. His broad rider's belt, studded with blue enameled rings, encircled a waist almost as slender as Jude's own. His white duck trousers were turned up to display new riding boots, and his spurs, a graduation gift, were of silver and chimed at his slightest movement.

"You're almost as good-looking as Jimmy Day," she said with a sudden chuckle. "Run along, Doug. You aren't old enough to protect me from these bad men!" And she turned to dance with the waiting Jimmy.

It was nearing midnight when Douglas achieved his first dance with Inez. She was the best dancer in the room, and Douglas told her so.

"I'll bet you haven't told that to the other girls," she said with a flash of her white teeth.

"I have! I said it to Jude when she turned me down for Dad."

"Smart! Helps both you and me with Jude, of course!"

"Much you care about that!" retorted Douglas.

"I like to be liked, of course," said Inez.

"You do?" Douglas' voice was so honestly incredulous that Inez exclaimed resentfully:

"Am I so much worse than a lot of the kids at school?"

Douglas shrugged his shoulders and replied, "Judith's straight. I've kept her so."

Inez laughed. "Judith's straight because she's that kind of a girl. Why don't you watch your dad instead of Jude?"

Douglas' lips tightened and Inez studied his face in silence for a moment; then she went on, "Pretty fond of Jude, aren't you, Doug? Your father is a devil with women—that big, bossy, good-looking kind always is. I tell Jude so every time I see her."

"How often do you see her?" demanded Douglas quickly.

"I guess she has a right to come to my house as often as she wants to."

"No, she hasn't," brusquely.

Inez sniffed, then smiled. She had a frank and lovely smile. Douglas' face softened and they finished the waltz in silence.

Not all the music was of the cheaply popular variety. Between dances Peter slipped on occasional opera records. He was playing from *Martha*:

> "Ah, so pure, so bright,
> Burst her beauty upon my sight,
> Ah, so mild, ah, so divine
> She beguiled this heart of mine."

when a man called from the open door, "Good evening, folks!"

"Why, it's Scott Parsons!" cried Grandma Brown.

There was a pause, during which the tender voice of the phonograph thrilled on. Young Jeff, his red face even redder than his visits to the pail would warrant, put his hand to his hip. Judith darted before him and ran the length of the room.

"Hello, Scott! Welcome home! The next dance is yours."

"No, it's not!" shouted John Spencer. "You let Judith alone, you blank young outlaw you!"

"Get out of my way, Jude!" shouted Young Jeff. "I told Scott not to come back to Lost Chief!"

He strode down the room, his hand still on his gun. Scott's hand had been equally quick. Peter Knight turned off the machine. "Hold on, Jeff!" he cried. "You turned Scott over to the law, and the law acquitted him. If you'd wanted to take things in your own hands, you should have done so before the trial. If you kill Scott, you're no better than he is."

"That's right!" cried Grandma Brown. "And your record ain't so clean, Young Jeff, that you can afford to start anything!"

Judith tossed her head. "I don't see why Young Jeff should be allowed to spoil a perfectly good party."

"If you can't put him out, Jude, I can!" cried Inez.

Everybody laughed. Jude seized one of Young Jeff's big hands, Inez the other. There was an uproarious scuffle which ended in the three, laughing immoderately, executing a hybrid folk dance to the one-step which Peter began to play. And Scott danced unmolested during the remainder of the night.

Charleton Falkner had drunk a good deal but was as yet little the worse for it. He and Douglas met at the

pail shortly after midnight. Charleton gave the young man an amused glance.

"You look sort of bored, Doug! Come outside and talk a little."

Douglas gave a quick glance around the hall—at Judith, swooping in great circles with Scott Parsons, at Inez dancing with his father. "All right!" he said, and followed Charleton out into the moonlight. They perched on the buck fence and smoked for a time in silence.

"That's a good horse of Young Jeff's, eh?" said Charleton finally.

"Not as good as the dapple gray he gave me will be when I get time to break him," replied Douglas. "I don't know! I'm not as interested in things as I was."

"What's the matter?" asked Charleton, sympathetically.

"I guess Oscar's killing upset me," said Douglas vaguely.

"I don't suppose you ever heard of Weltschmerz," mused Charleton. "It's a kind of mental stomach-ache most young fellows get about the time they begin to fall in love."

Douglas grunted.

"Though you were pretty young to run into Oscar that way," Charleton went on thoughtfully.

"It isn't that; though I was scared stiff, of course. But it was seeing Oscar laid in the ground to rot and hearing you and Peter and Dad say that was all there was to it."

Charleton nodded. "I know! But you'll reach my state of don't give a hoop-la, when you're a little older. Wine and women and a good horse. They help."

Douglas drew a shuddering breath. "Is that all you've found out? All?"

"Of course, there's ambition," said Charleton. "I was ambitious, myself, once. You know my father was a college man and he wanted me to go back East to school. I almost went."

"Why didn't you go?" asked Douglas, immensely flattered at the mark of confidence being shown him. Charleton Falkner was notoriously reticent about himself.

"O, it's this easy life of the open! Why should I have gone into politics as my father wanted me to, when I could be happier with an easy living right here? And it would all end up there in the cemetery, anyhow. And what had ambition to offer me in comparison to the sport of running wild horses on Fire Mesa, or riding herd in the Reserve or hunting deer on Falkner's Peak. Horses, dogs, guns, women, whiskey, the open country of the Rockies. Enough for any man."

"Maybe!" muttered Douglas.

"What are you going to do now you're through school?" asked Charleton abruptly.

"Ride for Dad. He's promised me a herd of my own when I'm twenty-one."

"Listen!" said Charleton. "How'd you like to do a little business with me once in a while when John can spare you? You know, cattle, horses and such!"

Douglas grinned delightedly. "Do you really mean it? Why, you know, Charleton, as well as I do, there isn't a young rider in Lost Chief who wouldn't give anything to go out on trips with you."

"Fine! I'll be tipping you the wink one of these days. In the meantime, keep your mouth shut to every one but your father. Come in and we'll have a drink on the new partnership."

Douglas had as yet acquired no great taste for such

fiery pollutions as the pail contained. But Charleton now applied himself so strenuously to the business of getting drunk that shortly he was leaning on the phonograph and reciting with powerful lungs:

> "'Tis but a tent where takes his one day's rest
> A Sultan to the realm of Death addrest;
> The Sultan rises and the dark Ferrash
> Strikes and prepares it for another Guest."

No one heeded him particularly. He smiled amiably at Peter, leaned farther on the machine, and said, "Somebody will have to ease me to my horse," then he drowsed forward over the phonograph. Douglas and Peter, laughing, eased him to his horse, and Charleton, his arms around Democrat's neck, jogged slowly off on the home trail.

June dawn was peering over the Indian Range when the party broke up. Scott disappeared with Judith. When John discovered this, he bolted after the two.

"You'd better go see that nothing happens, Doug," said Mary Spencer. "John's drunk too much."

"I'm going home," declared Douglas. "I got some pride, and Judith's treated me like a dog to-night. She's too fond of starting something she don't know the finish of."

Mary and he were riding alone in the dawn. "You promised me you'd look out for her. Don't you care for her any more, Douglas?"

"Yes, I do!"

"Have you ever told her so?"

"She's too young."

"No, she isn't, Douglas. You remember you told me she knew more than I do."

Douglas said nothing; and after a moment, his step-

mother said, hesitatingly, "Doug, I hate to see you dancing so much with Inez."

"What harm was there in it?"

"I don't know that I can tell you, Doug. When I was a girl, going to the log schoolhouse, we girls never thought of touching whiskey. Our mothers would have killed us if we had."

"The world do move!" grunted Douglas.

"I don't believe it's the world. Not from the books I read. I think it's just Lost Chief. The old folks in my day had real influence in the valley. There were many like Grandma Brown. But now! Why, your father will never be the good influence his father was, and I'd never be like Grandma. I don't know why."

"You can't even train your own daughter," said Douglas with entire frankness.

"Can the other mothers?" asked Mary resentfully. "What can I do when the other mothers are so easy?"

"It ain't exactly easy." Douglas spoke thoughtfully. "The Lord knows, all the kids in Lost Chief work hard enough and get walloped enough."

Mary sighed deeply. Douglas watched her face, so like Judith's but bearing tragic lines it would have broken his heart to see around Judith's young lips. With unwonted gentleness he leaned over to put his hand on Mary's while he smiled at her half sadly.

"Poor Mother! We are an ornery lot! But you are as good as gold, and Jude and I both know it!"

Quick tears stung Mary's gray eyes. She lifted his hand to her cheek for a moment, then, as he drew it away, she tried to return his smile. But nothing more was said until they reached home.

Just as they entered the living-room, Judith rushed in,

"I hate Dad! I hate him! Scott and I were jogging home by way of the west trail as peaceful as anything when Dad has to come along and start a row going!"

"Anybody hurt?" asked Douglas, watching Judith as she sat down on the edge of her bed, big tears on her cheeks.

"No, but no thanks to Dad! Scott turned round and left because I asked him to. There's Dad now!"

John clanked in, but before he could speak Judith rose and shook her forefinger in his face.

"Now, Dad," she said steadily, "there's going to be no rowing and no cursing. I'm sick of it! Right here and now I warn you to stop interfering with me or I'll leave!"

John raised his ready fist.

"None of that!" Doug's voice was quiet. "Finish what you have to say, Jude."

John scowled, breathing heavily, his eyes never leaving Judith.

"I'm sick of it," she repeated. "There must be places in the world where there's something beside family rows."

"Are you through?" demanded John.

"Yes, I am."

"Then I've got one thing to say. You let Scott Parsons alone." John flung himself on the bed, and before Mary had taken off his spurred riding boots he was asleep.

Douglas went out to the corral where, soon after, Judith appeared with her milking pail. The tender pink mists rolled slowly away from the yellow wall of Lost Chief range. Judith, with heavy eyes and burning cheeks, looked from the mists to Douglas, who leaned on the fence and watched her.

"Jude," he said, "you are on the wrong foot. You ought to let whiskey and Inez Rodman alone."

"Why don't you let 'em alone?" demanded Judith.

"It's different with a man!"

"O, don't give me that old stuff!" cried the girl. "We women do men's work in this valley. We'll have the men's kind of fun if we want it!"

"That's not the point," returned Douglas. "Women have to pay a price the men don't and that's all there is to it."

"It's not fair! It's not fair! I hate the world! I hate it! Looks like you'd either got to be like Mother or Inez Rodman."

"Your mother's all right. Only Dad's broke her just like he broke old Molly horse."

"Did I ever say my mother wasn't all right? Only I'll tell you one thing, Doug Spencer, Inez Rodman's given me more sensible warnings about men than my mother ever did."

Douglas wore a worried expression. "Seems like there's something wrong about that. Mother knows all about those things." He cleared his throat.

The half angry look on Judith's face gave way to a smile.

"O Doug! Doug! You old owl! What's the matter with you? After all, it's good to be alive! I wish I had a horse as good as Buster and I wouldn't ask for much more in life."

"I'll give you Buster," said Douglas suddenly.

Judith's jaw dropped. "Give me Buster!"

"I mean it."

"But—but—why, Douglas, what's happened to you?"

"Judith!" Douglas tossed back his yellow hair and

put a brown hand over Judith's. "Judith! I love you. Won't you be engaged to me?"

"Love *me?*" Judith's beautiful gray eyes opened their widest. "Why, it doesn't seem more than yesterday that you were calling me a pug-nosed maverick. And besides, I'm only fifteen and you're only seventeen."

"Is it Scott?" asked Douglas.

"It isn't anybody! Why, Douglas, you must be crazy!"

"Do I look crazy?"

Judith stared deep into Douglas' blue eyes. "No," slowly, "you don't."

"You can have Buster and Prince too," said Douglas.

"No, sir, Doug! Why, they're all you've got in the world!"

"I have that dapple gray Young Jeff gave me after the trial. He's old enough to break now."

There were tears in Judith's eyes. "Douglas Spencer, you are a gentleman! If I do have a horse like Buster, I can be lots more help handling the cattle."

"He's yours from this minute," repeated Douglas. "And so am I yours. But I'm not going to nag you about it. I'm just going to try to look out for you."

There was something so sober, so gentle, and so determined about Douglas that for once in her life Judith was at a loss for a reply. She started slowly for the cow shed. Then she turned back.

"But I'm not going to take Prince, Douglas. That's too much!"

"Well," said Douglas. "Maybe I will keep Prince for a while. It'll be kind of lonesome."

"Lonesome!" Judith repeated the phrase as though it struck a familiar chord. "Life is lonesome, isn't it Doug! Seems as though I never dare to be myself any

more, since Oscar's death. That was the first time I ever realized how lonely you can be."

Douglas nodded, his eyes full of an understanding that was pitiful. Youth should not be allowed to contemplate this sort of loneliness. It is soul searing.

"But remember, Judith," he said, "that you've always got me."

She gave him an enigmatic look and returned to her work.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOUSE IN THE YELLOW CANYON

"Beauty: to see it, to hear it, to feel it: that's all that makes life worth while."

—Inez Rodman.

DOUGLAS was both elated and dejected by his conversation with Judith. He was elated to feel that at last Judith knew his feeling toward her. He was dejected because he felt that she had no understanding of the depth and sincerity of this feeling. And with that marvelously naive egotism of the male, he gave many hours of heavy thought to Judith's weaknesses and temptations, none at all to his own. Perhaps more than anything, Judith's friendship with Inez began to worry him. The more he pondered on it, the more perturbed he became; and finally, a week or so after the dance, he resolved to ask Inez to break with Judith.

The Rodman house was built against the sheer yellow stone facing at the base of Lost Chief range, known incorrectly as the Yellow Canyon. The house of half a dozen rooms was the most picturesque cabin in the valley, for Grandfather Rodman had built the roof with an overhang, giving the house the hospitable shadows of a little Swiss chalet. There were several hundred acres belonging to the ranch. Free range had grown small before Inez' father died and he had gotten his acres well into grass and alfalfa. But when he and Inez' mother were wiped out by smallpox, leaving the ranch to Inez,

the fields rapidly returned to the wild. Inez, fifteen at the time of her parents' death, was unwilling to lead the life of a ranch woman and for ten years the ranch had been going to pieces.

When Douglas rode up to the outer corral in the dusk of the June evening, he was struck anew by the disorder of the place. Cattle tramped freely about the house. An old steer was poking his head in at the kitchen window. Chickens roosted on a saddle, which was flung in the stable muck. Tin cans, old wagon wheels, the ruin of a sheep wagon, were heaped in confusion at one end of the cabin. Three or four dogs barked as Doug rode up on old Mike. He called Prince in and looked inquiringly at two other horses tied to the dilapidated corral fence. They were Beauty, his father's horse, and Yankee, Peter's roan.

As Doug sat hesitating, John and Peter came out of the kitchen laughing. They swung, spurs clanking, up to the fence.

"What the devil are you doing here, Doug?" asked Peter Knight.

"Hasn't he got a right to call on the Harlot of the Canyon?" demanded John, with a chuckle. "Hustle up, Peter! The crowd'll be there for the game before you are."

"They can't get in till I unlock," replied Peter. "Here, John, take the key and ride on. I want to talk to Doug."

John caught the key and trotted off. Sister snarled at Prince, who wagged his tail apologetically.

"Sister's a shrew, all right," grinned Douglas.

"She sure can run coyotes, though," said Peter.

"She and Grandma Brown run this valley," added Douglas.

Peter laughed. "I'm strong for the ladies! Did you

ever watch the moon rise, Doug, from the top of the bench back of the cabin there?"

"No," answered Douglas.

"Come on up! It's not a long ride. I've been wanting to make you a proposition for some time."

Douglas followed the postmaster silently. The horses were panting and sweating by the time they reached the top, and the rim of the moon was just peering over the edge of the Indian Range. All the valley lay in darkness. The two dismounted and threw themselves down on the ledge. Douglas lighted a cigarette while Peter filled his pipe.

"What are you planning to do with yourself now you're through school, Douglas?"

"Ride for Dad."

"How'd you like to go East to school?"

"Nothing doing! I've got more education now than I'll need as a rancher."

"Well, I guess that's not particularly so," said Peter. "I was thinking—you know I'm alone in the world—that I might help you out if you had any leaning toward college or a profession."

"Ranching is good enough for me, thank you all the same, Peter."

For some moments Peter did not speak again. Coyotes wailed in the peaks above them. The moon showed more of its golden face.

"Does your father ever talk to you about your own mother, Doug?"

"No; I quit asking him questions years ago. Peter, all I know about my mother is that her name was Esther, that the smallpox wiped her folks out, and that they owned the north half of our ranch. There's an old photo-

graph of her in Dad's bureau drawer. She was awful pretty."

"She was more than that, Doug! I knew her well. You see, I'm the only man in the valley that's a stranger, as you might say. I've only lived here twenty years. So I could appreciate your mother more than the natives. I came here a roundabout way from Boston. So did your mother's folks, about forty-five years ago. She looked as Yankee as her blood, thin and delicate, with a refined face. And all the coarse work women have to do in Lost Chief didn't coarsen her."

"How do you mean, coarse work?" asked Doug.

Dimly in the moonlight he saw the postmaster rub his hand across his forehead.

"Why don't you put Buster to hauling and plowing?" asked Peter.

"Too light and nervous."

"So was your mother too light and nervous for the kind of ranch work women have to do here. Women with blood and brains like most of the Lost Chief women are best used to keep alive the decencies and gentler things of life. Men lose those things in a cattle country unless the women keep 'em alive. If you keep women too close to the details of handling cattle and horses, they get rough and coarse too. And I calculate that Lost Chief and the world needs some decency and delicacy."

Douglas pondered over this for a long time, his eyes on the glory of the Indian peaks. Then he said, "You knew my mother well?"

"Yes. I'd have married her, Doug, if she hadn't already married your father. She—she was so devilishly overworked and unhappy! But she never complained. Your father was crazy about her but he treats a woman

like he does a horse. He doesn't know any different."

"O, don't tell me any more!" said Douglas brokenly. "The poor little thing! Seems as if I couldn't stand it. Peter, I'm glad she died!"

The older man was silent for a time, then went on. "Your mother came of good people. Her grandfather was a friend of Emerson's. Tucked away somewhere she had some letters the two men exchanged. Your grandfather dreamed dreams about establishing a new New England out here. Those letters should have been saved for you."

The radiant light now swept across Lost Chief creek and to the foot of the wall, drenching the Rodman ranch in beauty and mystery. Sister crowded against her master's back and snored. Prince whined dolefully as he always did at the moon.

"So taking one thing with another," Peter Knight explained, "I thought I might see if you had anything in your head except horse wrangling; whether you're as much your Dad inside as outside."

"I don't see why ranching isn't a good enough profession for any one!" protested the boy.

"In lots of places it is. But it's not in Lost Chief."

"I don't see why," repeated Douglas.

"It's awful hard here on the women is one reason. I never heard your mother swear or use a foul word," said Peter. "I've been on ranches in other places where the women would have been shocked at the idea. How about Judith?"

"You know she only curses like the other women do around here."

"Do you like it?" asked the postmaster.

"I never thought anything about it."

"There you are!" groaned Peter. "If I can only make

you see! Doug, a woman lets down the first bar when she begins to swear and drink. She begins where Judith is beginning. She's mighty apt to end where Inez is ending. You just think about ranching in Lost Chief from your mother's point of view. It's a rough kind of a community, Douglas, compared with the same class of people in other communities. The talk itself is rough; how rough you can't appreciate because you've never heard anything else."

There was another silence. Then Douglas asked heavily: "Peter, what am I going to do to keep Judith from going to Inez for advice?"

"Might not be such bad advice! Inez has no illusions about what she's doing or what she's paying."

"You don't mean to say Judith ought to go there?"

"No, I don't! But if a kid like you goes there himself, how can you preach to Judith? And she only goes there for the dancing and fun."

"But I'm a man!"

"I don't care what you are. You can't preach good sermons with a foul tongue. You ought to have the nerve to look at yourself as you are before you try to bring up Judith. Lost Chief is still fairly honest. Even your father calls Inez Rodman by her right title. There's hope in that!"

"But what shall I do about Judith, Peter?"

"Might make a man of yourself, Doug!"

"What's the matter with me?" demanded Doug, indignantly.

"Douglas, you haven't a clean-cut idea to your name. And a kid of seventeen as self-satisfied as you are isn't worth baiting a coyote trap with."

"There's not a guy in the valley works harder than I do!"

"Right! Nor uses his brain less!"

"I suppose you mean I ought to go to college and let Judith go to the devil."

"Judith's pretty good stuff, herself," protested Peter. "A half-baked kid like you can't influence Judith!"

Douglas started to his feet. "By God, I will! You'll see!"

"There's only one way. Show yourself fit to influence her. Don't get a grouch at me, Doug. I've come a long, hard, lonely road. And all because I thought everybody was wrong but myself. I don't want your mother's son to make the same mistake, if I can help it."

"I'm the unhappiest guy in the world!" cried Douglas, passionately.

He mounted his horse and, followed joyfully by Prince, turned down the trail. Peter did not stir. For a long time he sat with his arm around Sister. The moon was high over the valley before he said aloud:

"O Esther! Esther! The years are long!" Then he too mounted and rode away.

As Doug trotted through Rodman's door-yard, Inez crossed toward the corral.

"Hello, Doug! Where've you been? What's the matter with Buster?"

Douglas drew up. "I gave him to Judith."

"Why, you blank little fool! It must have hurt you deep!"

"I guess Judith's worth it! Say, Inez, is there anything I can do for you to get you to keep Judith away from here?"

"I won't hurt her, Doug."

"Aw, Inez, what's the use of saying that! Make out you're sore at her."

"I could, but that won't do so much for her. Judith

ought to have something to look forward to beside breeding calves and wrangling firewood for some lazy dog of a rancher, before she or any other Lost Chief girl will think keeping away from here is worth while."

There was a depth of bitterness in the woman's voice which Douglas felt rather than understood. He sat in awkward silence. Inez put her hand on his knee and looked up at him. Her face was tragically beautiful in the moonlight.

"Douglas, do you ever stop to think how beautiful Lost Chief country is?"

"Not often," admitted Doug.

Inez went on. "Peter Knight's been all over the United States and he says there's no place passes it in beauty. Sometimes when I see the valley looking like it does to-night, I cry. Doug, you are more promising than these other kids. When you ride round on the range try to keep your mind a little bit off cattle and horses and women and keep it on that line of the Forest Reserve the way it looks to-night. Or the way this yellow wall looks in the snow and the sunrise on it. And then, when you get that habit, tell Judith about it and get her to thinking the same way. Beauty can't live on rot, Douglas. I know that now. I don't care what Charleton quotes."

"Inez," asked Douglas huskily, "why don't you burn that old cabin up?"

"It's too late," replied Inez shortly; and she turned on her heel and left him.

Douglas rode thoughtfully along the home trail. He was angry with Peter and sorry for Inez, and he missed his mother as he never had missed her before. He had been only a baby at the time of her death. This was the first time that he had been told of the type of woman

she was though he had heard much of his mother's father, old Bill Douglas. He went to bed that night with an entirely new set of thoughts.

The heaviest ranch work of the year was now at hand. The hay harvest was begun. From dawn until dusk, Doug and Judith worked in the fields and tumbled to bed at night as soon as the chores were done. They had many opportunities during the day for conversations, however, for after the hay was raked, Douglas and Judith drove one rick team, John and old Johnny Brown the other. Heavy work it certainly was, but work of what fragrance, under skies of what an unbelievably deep blue, in air of what tingling warmth and clearness! What unthinkable distances were glimpsed from the wild hay patch on the flank of Dead Line Peak! It seemed to Douglas, lying at length, chin elbow-supported, on the top of the last load, which Judith had insisted on driving, that he never before had sensed the beauty of the haying season in Lost Chief Valley. And again he seemed to see Inez's tragic eyes, which had shed tears over the beauty of these very hills. He turned the memory of those eyes over in his mind with a memory of the sardonic twist of Charleton's mouth as he had uttered his philosophy of life, and suddenly Doug wished that he dared to talk to his father about these things. He had asked John about the Emerson letters but John professed never to have heard of them. And Douglas fell to wondering about his grandfather's dream for Lost Chief.

They were pulling through the swamp road above the home corral. It was heavy going and when they reached the shade of a little clump of blue spruce and aspen, Judith pulled the team up for a short rest. She pushed

her broad straw hat back from her face and half turned to look at Douglas.

"Have you seen that new litter of pups of Sister's?" she asked Douglas.

He shook his head and Judith went on. "Peter says I can have the pick of the lot, but there's only one I'd look at. He's the image of Sister. I'm going to train him so's I can take him out to run wild horses with me when he grows up."

"Wild horses! The last time it was bronco busting you were going into. What's it all about, anyhow, Jude?"

"You don't suppose I'm going to spend my life in Lost Chief, do you?" demanded Judith.

Douglas swept the landscape with a lazy glance. "I don't see how you could beat it."

"O, for looks and stunts, yes!" Judith's voice was impatient. "But it's no place for a woman! I'm going to earn enough money to take me out where I can go on with my education and amount to something."

"I guess Peter's been talking to you," said Douglas.

Judith nodded. "Yes, and he offered to loan me the money for college. But I won't be beholden to a man outside the family. I'll earn it myself."

"What'll you do with a college education after you get it?" Doug's glance was not lazy now, as it rested on the young girl's eager face.

"I'll do something beside cooking anl horse wrangling for some old Lost Chief rancher, I can tell you that!" cried Judith. "I'm going to get out and see the world and know life!"

"And give up your horses and dogs and the big old mountains? Jude, you'll never do it. I'd like to get

out myself sometimes, but I know I'll never be happy anywhere else."

"I don't expect to be happy, but I've got to know things."

"What things, Judith?"

The girl turned from Douglas to gaze at the far light on Fire Mesa.

"The truth about things," she said at last. "Inez says there's just one big fact at the bottom of everything and that is sex, and that there's only one thing worth living for, to make sex beautiful."

"She's a liar!" exclaimed Douglas indignantly, as if Inez had said something shameful. "Where does she get that rotten stuff?"

"From Charleton and poetry, I guess. How do you know she's wrong, Doug?"

Douglas sat up, his clear eyes blazing like blue stars out of his sunburned face. "Because I know! I want to have the biggest, finest ranch in the Rockies. Is that sex? You want a good education. Is that sex? Peter wants me to carry on some dreams my mother and grandfather had. Is that sex? What does that woman think the world was made for, I'd like to know?"

"That's just it," Judith sighed with all the sadness of sixteen, "what is it made for?"

There was silence for a moment on the hay rick while the two young questioners gazed at the incomparable grandeur about them. And as he gazed there returned to Douglas the sense of panic that had harassed him after Oscar's death. What did it all mean? Whither was he directed and by what? How long before he too would be swept into the awful void beyond the grave?

"That's what religion did for folks all these years," he said suddenly. "They never asked these questions, I'll bet. I wish I had it."

"I don't want to believe fairy tales just because I'm scared!" Judith tossed her head stoutly.

"I don't either," agreed Douglas dejectedly.

"I'm going to drive on home and get something to eat," said Judith, lifting the reins. "Food's the only thing that'll rid me of the dumb horrors."

Douglas settled back against the hay, and the rest of the ride was continued in silence.

Old Johnny Brown stayed on for a day or so to clean up odd jobs neglected during the haying season. He was a gentle, timid little chap, the butt of the entire valley, of course, and particularly of John Spencer. Douglas often wondered why old Johnny consented to work each year at this season for his father. This wonderment was solved the day after Doug's and Jude's conversation on the load of hay and in a manner destined in a small way to have its influence on Douglas' affairs in the years to come.

Just before supper Judith returned from the post-office and rushed into the kitchen with a huge, long-legged, ugly puppy in her arms. She set him on the floor where his four knotty legs pointed in four different directions and where his long back sagged like the letter U. He was covered with rough gray hair and his eyes were huge and brown.

"Isn't he a perfect lamb? He's mine!" cried Judith, squatting beside him.

"Oh! A lamb!" grunted John, who was combing his hair at the wash-basin in the corner. "I thought it was a buffalo calf."

"Don't be stupid!" cried Judith. "Of course, you're no judge of dogs, but Peter says he's just like Sister was at two months, only bigger."

Mary Spencer looked him over critically, coffee-pot in hand. "Isn't he awful homely, even for a mongrel, Judith?" she asked.

"Mongrel! What is the matter with all you folks?" exclaimed Judith. "He's no more mongrel than anybody else! Come here to your missis, you precious!" and she gathered the great pup into her lap, where he sat complacently, his legs in a hopeless tangle.

"What's his name?" asked old Johnny, mildly.

"Wolf Cub. And you wait till I'm through with him! You'll see the best trained dog in the valley, like Sioux will be the best trained bull and Buster the best trained horse. O, look, Doug!" as Douglas came in. "See what I've got!"

"I dare you to name its pedigree, Doug!" chuckled John.

Douglas lifted the pup to the floor and ran his hands over its skull, along its back, and down its erratic legs. "Some dog, Judith! You'll have to muzzle him by the time he's six months old."

Judith smiled triumphantly. "No, I won't! Wait till you see how I train him."

"You get that from your mother, Judith. She was always gregus smart with critters," said old Johnny.

Judith laughed skeptically. "She was!" The little old man nodded his head. "I remember. I deponed that same thing to Peter the other day. How Mary could break anything when she was a girl, like you."

"Well, but Mother won't touch anything that isn't broke now!" exclaimed Judith.

"Just what I deponed," nodded Johnny. "John broke her just like he broke old Molly horse, so she lost her nerve. I deponed just that. An awful rough breaker. I deponed just that."

"O dry up, Johnny!" grunted John, drawing his chair up to the table. "I've put up with an awful lot of drool from you, and I'm getting sick of it."

Old Johnny was always most explanatory when he was most frightened. "I wasn't drooling, John. I was just deponing. Any one can do that, can't they? And Mary did used to be like Judith."

"Will you shut up!" shouted John.

The puppy, startled, gave a sudden loud howl.

"Put that thing out and come to supper, Jude! If he howls to-night, I'll shoot him." Judith left the house indignantly.

"No, you won't, Dad," said Douglas quietly, as he buttered a biscuit.

"If you're going to give me back talk, young fellow, you leave the table now, before I lose my temper."

"I'm not giving you any more back talk than you deserve," replied Douglas. "Any man that would threaten to shoot a pup because it howls deserves something more than back talk. Let's forget it. Johnny, how about this stunt of Mother's breaking horses?"

Old Johnny gave John a timid glance. "I don't remember," he muttered.

Mary laughed. "What's the use of a woman breaking horses when she's got a man to do it for her?"

"Did you ever see her break a horse, Johnny?" insisted Doug.

"Once," said the old man, "a lot of the boys tied me on a mule and the mule ran away. It wasn't broke, that

mule. Seem like it had run a gregus long way when Mary come along. She was just a walking and she reached up and grabbed the mule and she rode him back with me. And she made them untie me. And I loved her ever since. I came up here every year to see how John is treating her. I depone—"

John rose and, striding around the table, he seized the old man by the collar. Douglas put his hand on his father's arm.

"Drop it, Dad, or I swear I'll think old Johnny is a better man than you. I asked him to tell. Throw me out if you want to. Keep your hands off this little chap. One thing is sure. He appreciates Mother more than any of the rest of us have."

"Get the half-wit out of my sight, then," growled John, returning to his seat.

"I wish a lot of folks with whole wits knew how to be as good a friend as Johnny," said Douglas stoutly.

"So do I!" Mary's voice trembled, but her glance at the little old man was very lovely.

The rest of the meal was finished in silence, Douglas turning over in his mind this strange new picture of Judith's mother. Could anything, he wondered, change Judith so? A curious anger against his father's stupidity was at that moment born in Douglas' heart, an anger that never was wholly to leave him.

That evening, as Douglas sat in his favorite place beside the alfalfa stack, old Johnny led up his little gray mare.

"I'll be cowling myself along home now, Doug," he said. "John is awful insidious to me. I just want to say, Doug, that you're the first man in this valley ever stuck up for me and some day I depone I'll get even with you."

"Good for you, Johnny!" nodded Douglas. "When I get my old ranch going, you come up and work for me."

"I will so do," replied the old man solemnly, and he rode away in the moonlight.

And Douglas returned to the new theme old Johnny had given him. Of what were women made that they could be over-broken as his father had over-broken Mary? And why should Lost Chief, so small that control was simple, permit such a thing to be?

CHAPTER V

THE HUNT ON LOST CHIEF

"A guy that don't rustle cattle when the rustling is good, is a fool."

—*Scott Parsons.*

ONE hot afternoon in August Douglas had just unhitched the panting team from the plow in the new oat field when Charleton Falkner trotted up on Democrat.

"How's the fall plowing, Doug?"

"Just out of the woods, Charleton."

"Your father says he can spare you for a day or two. I wish you'd come down to my place to-night. I'm planning a trip. I don't suppose John would loan you Beauty for a couple of days?"

Douglas shook his head.

"Well," Charleton went on, "I guess Buster can stand up under the work."

"Buster belongs to Judith now. I've been trying to get time to break that dapple gray Young Jeff gave me, after the trial. He's a good horse. Darned if I don't think I can ride him now!"

"I know that horse and he is a good one," agreed Charleton. "Ride the young moose if you can stick on him. You'll need all his wind and limb on this trip!" and Charleton trotted away.

It was full starlight that night when Douglas freed his feet from the stirrups before Charleton's door and jumped like lightning from the saddle. His horse

jumped with him, landing in the kitchen as Douglas brought up against the door-jamb. There was a roar of laughter from within, and as the horse lunged backward out of the door, Charleton appeared.

"So you and the moose are here! Better hobble him, Doug!"

Douglas laughed and tied the rearing horse to a hayrack. Then he followed Charleton into the kitchen. Scott Parsons was sitting by the table, hat on the back of his head, spurred boots on the cold stove hearth. Mrs. Falkner was just finishing the supper dishes. She greeted Douglas with a tired smile.

Douglas, with a resentful glance at Scott, shifted his gun belt, shoved his own hat to the back of his head, and sat down. Mrs. Falkner pitched the dish water out the back door and went into the next room.

"Well, fellows," said Charleton cheerfully, as he tipped back his chair and established his spurs beside Scott's, "there's a neat little job on the horizon. You both know the big canyon beyond Lost Chief Peak, that has the little creek that disappears under the range?"

The young men nodded, and Charleton continued.

"A Mormon named Elijah Nelson has settled there. I'm not certain of all he intends to do but I know this much: He's to homestead that canyon up there and hog the water rights on the creek. He's to be followed by nine other Mormon families. Some of 'em are going to raise cattle in the canyon. Some of 'em are going into the sheep business in the plains country beyond the canyon, where we Lost Creek folks have been in the habit of wintering our herd when the snow's too deep here. Some of us older Lost Chief men realize that these folks are the beginning of a march of Mormons up from Utah to run us Lost Chief folks out. And we're going to

harry them till they are sick of living. Mormons and sheep must keep out of this country."

Douglas' eyes burned and his breath came quickly. Scott's hard young eyes did not flicker.

"We're going to ride over the range to-morrow night and the next morning gather up what we can of Nelson's herd that's grazing on Lost Chief. We'll bring 'em to a certain place I know of. I'll divide half to me, the other half to you two. Are you game?"

"I sure am," said Scott. "How many do you think we can gather in?"

"Not so many on one trip. Perhaps fifteen if we have good luck. A big herd leaves a big trail."

"There's an old corral up near the Government elevation monument," said Douglas. "It's all overgrown with bushes and young aspens so's I don't think one person out of twenty, knows it's there. Maybe we could corral 'em there?"

Charleton gave Douglas a quick glance. "How'd you come to know about it?"

"I happened on it last summer tracking a bear."

"That's what I planned to use," nodded Charleton. "We'll make a real cowman out of you yet. So you're ready to go, Doug?"

Douglas' eyes were blazing. "Go! You couldn't pay me enough to keep me away! Nothing ever happens in this old valley."

"All right! Be here by nine o'clock to-morrow night, wearing chaps. It'll be rough riding and that Moose of yours will be quite considerably broke by the time we get back, Doug. I'll supply the grub."

"Fine!" said Scott, rising. "If that's all, I'll be running along. Stage was late to-night and the crowd'll be there getting mail. I'll be with you on time, Charleton."

"Me too!" exclaimed Douglas, following Scott.

Weary as he was, Douglas was long in getting to sleep that night. Charleton Falkner was deeply admired by all the young men of Lost Chief. Not only was he of the ultra-sophisticated type, dear to adolescence, not only was he by far the cleverest hunter in the valley, but, most important of all, his name was whispered in connection with horse and cattle deals, never called questionable by Lost Chief but always mentioned with a wink and a chuckle for their adroitness. To have been asked by Charleton to go as a partner on one of his mysterious trips was intoxicating enough to take the sting out of the fact that Scott met Judith that evening at the post-office and rode home with her.

The next day Judith several times tried to discover where Doug was going and with whom.

"Don't you try tagging me again, like you did on the trip to the half-way house," he said with a warning grin, when they were finishing the evening chores together.

"No danger! I got a date of my own!" This with a toss of her curly head.

"Who with?"

"Don't you wish you knew! Other folks beside you can have interesting deals, Mr. Douglas Spencer!"

"Huh! Some little stunt with Maud, I suppose."

"No, it isn't either. Say, Doug, did you know Maud is going up to Mountain City to stay with her aunt and go to school there?"

"I suppose that's what you'd like to do?" Doug watched the eager face closely.

"Well, not just now," replied Judith with a little grin. "I want to keep my date, first."

"Well, don't get into mischief, daughter; that's all I

have to say about your mysterious deal," said Douglas paternally.

Judith laughed and carried her pail of milk into the kitchen.

It was after ten o'clock that night when Charleton led his two young henchman along the west trail, past Rodman's and up the canyon toward the first shoulder of Lost Chief Peak. The Moose did not approve of the trip. He showed his disapproval by plunging and side jumping with nerve-racking persistency. Ginger and Democrat gave him ample turning room, biting or kicking him if he drew too near them. Midway in the canyon Charleton left the trail and turned abruptly to the left, up the sheer shoulder of the mountain.

"Need a hazer, Doug?" he called.

"Where are you going to camp, Charleton?" laughed Douglas, as the Moose refused the trail.

"On the west shoulder of the peak, just under the elevation monument."

"I'll find you there. I may be delayed for a while!"

Charleton laughed too. "Just so you get there by dawn!" he called; and Douglas saw the two figures, dim in the starlight, move upward on the barren shoulder of the mountain. He allowed the Moose to circle for a moment, then he drove the rowells deep. The snorting horse leaped up the steep incline, at a pace that shortly left him groaning for breath. But Douglas spurred him relentlessly to the far tree line. Here he permitted him to breathe while he listened to the receding thud of hoofs above.

When his horse had ceased to groan, Douglas turned him toward the dark shadow of the forest. The Moose reared and turned, falling heavily. Doug was out of the saddle when it cracked against the gravel and in it when

the trembling horse rolled to his feet. Doug brought the knotted reins smartly across the animal's reeking flanks.

The Moose bolted. Doug laughed and swore and for a time made no effort to guide his mount. The Moose leaped fallen trunks and low bushes. He jumped black abysses. He thrashed into trees and rocks. But he could not dislodge the figure that clung to his back with knee and spur. Douglas did not know how long this mad fight lasted, but he was beginning to be exhausted, himself, when the Moose stopped on the edge of a black drop. The horse was shaking and groaning.

"Now listen here, you Moose," said Douglas. "If you expect to be friends with me, you've got to begin to show some interest in me. I sure do admire your speed and your nerve. You're a better horse than Buster, and I don't want to break you more than I have to. But how about showing interest in me? I'm here to stay, you know, so you might as well begin to put me in your calculations. Now, just to show you're a changed horse, suppose you push up here to the right. I think there's a clear space there where I can see the stars and locate ourselves.

The Moose turned slowly under the rein, and carried Doug cleverly into an open park. Here Doug studied the brilliant heavens.

"We'll just move south, old Moose," he announced, "climbing uphill all the time, till we run into something."

The Moose worked steadily enough now, but it seemed a long time to Douglas before he saw the faint glare of a fire through the trees. Charleton and Scott looked up grinning as he rode into the circle of light. Wide bare patches showed on Doug's chaps. One sleeve of his flannel shirt was hanging by a thread. His face was

bleeding from many scratches, but he grinned amicably as he slid wearily from the saddle.

"Hello, Doug! Is your horse broke yet?" asked Charleton.

"Some," replied Douglas.

"We thought we heard you a while back!" said Scott. "Sounded as if a grizzly had been bitten by a hydrophobia skunk."

"He ain't as nervous as he was," grinned Douglas. "Anything to drink?"

Charleton indicated the coffee-pot and said, "It's only a short time to dawn. Better get what sleep you can!"

Douglas nodded, drank a tin cup of coffee, and then unsaddled the Moose. Scott, rolled in his blanket, watched him with a twisted grin.

"Some horse to take on a trip like this," he said. "A half-broke mule couldn't be worse. Funny if Doug don't gum the whole game for us, Charleton."

"You go to hell, Scott!" grunted Douglas.

Scott sat up with a jerk. Charleton spoke sharply. "No scrapping! You two get to sleep!"

Scott lay down reluctantly. Doug shrugged his broad shoulders, and shortly, head in his saddle, feet to the fire, he was fast asleep.

The trees were black against gray light when Charleton called the two young riders.

"Let's eat and be off," he said briefly.

Breakfast was a short affair of bread, bacon and coffee. While they were bolting it, Charleton outlined the campaign.

"You'll see Nelson's cattle have been all through here. No one else grazes hereabouts. Don't rope any cows with calves following 'em. They make too much bellowing. Get what steers you can by mid-morning into the

old corral. There isn't one chance in a thousand we'll meet any one. Nelson's making hay five miles below here. But if any one should come along when you've roped a steer, get him to examine the brand for you, and of course if the brand isn't yours, let the critter go."

"Where is the old corral from here?" asked Scott.

"Show him, Doug," ordered Charleton.

The camp had been made just within the tree line below the peak. Above, against the glowing pink of the heavens, was etched the suave line of the peak and topping this a heap of rocks, surmounted by a staff. West of the staff and below it projected the top of a dead spruce on which sat an eagle. To this Douglas pointed.

"Down the mountain on a line with the staff and the dead spruce in a thick clump of young aspen, about an acre of it. The old corral is there."

Scott nodded. They broke camp at once and trotted off, each one for himself. The Moose was not yet a cow-pony, but, from Doug's viewpoint at least, he was now quite manageable. Any one in Lost Chief could rope a steer from a well-trained horse. Douglas proposed to repay Scott's sneer by bringing in on his half-broken mount as many animals as either of his companions on their seasoned cow-ponies. And although Doug risked his life a hundred times, four of the dozen fat steers that were milling about in the old corral by nine o'clock had been dragged in by the snorting, trembling Moose.

When Doug closed the bars on his fourth steer, he waited for a short time for Charleton and Scott, but as neither appeared, he set off after another brute. He had ridden a good mile from the corral when he heard the bellow of a bull and a shout from Charleton. He spurred the Moose in the direction of the cry. Democrat

was standing with the reins over his head. Under a giant pine close by, Charleton was clinging desperately to the horns of a red bull. Blood was running over the back of his gray shirt. The bull was stamping in a circle in the vain attempt to trample his victim.

"Don't shoot!" gasped Charleton. "Rope his hind legs and throw him! By God, I'll keep him now!"

Twice Doug's lariat darted through the air before the loop caught. But the third attempt was successful and he raced the half-maddened Moose away and jerked the bull off his feet. Charleton rolled to his own lariat lying on the ground near Democrat. He grasped the rope, rose to his knees and twirled it. It twisted about the bull's mighty neck. Charleton sank back to a sitting position and pulled the rope taut.

"Dismount and come up on him, Doug, and hog tie him," he panted.

Douglas obeyed, and shortly the bull was helpless although he continued to bellow threateningly.

"He'll have Nelson up here even if he is five miles off," said Douglas anxiously. "Better let him go."

"Take a look at my ankle, Doug," ordered Charleton. "If it's nothing worse than a sprain, I'm in luck."

With many oaths on the part of Charleton, the high riding-boot was worked off, disclosing an ankle already puffed and discolored.

"A sprain! Well, I can sit Democrat with that. Now take a look at my shoulder."

Doug turned back the bloody shirt. The bull's horn had grazed the shoulder but not deeply. Doug tied the wound up with Charleton's neckerchief. He had just finished and was beginning with his own scarf on the ankle when Scott galloped up.

"Say, you can hear that bull for a thousand miles!

What the devil are you up to? I want you both to come and help me get three I've roped down the draw a couple of miles below here."

Douglas explained the accident.

"My gawd, Charleton, don't you know enough not to tackle a bull on foot?"

"How'd I know there was a bull around?" retorted the wounded man. "I dropped my rope and when I dismounted to pick it up, he came after me like a Kansas cyclone."

"Well, I'll take the bull to the corral and come back here for grub if Douglas will fix it up. We will put plenty of whiskey and hot coffee in you, Charleton. Do you think you can get home, while Doug and I ride herd?"

"I sure can! Go ahead, Scott. You'd better blind the bull."

Scott nodded, and picking up several handsful of dry dirt, he threw them into the bull's wide, bloodshot eyes. The animal snorted and tossed his head. Scott continued with handful after handful until the bull's eyes were only muddy blanks under his tossing forehead. His bellowing ceased. Then Scott removed the ropes from his hind legs and, mounting, led him away. The bull was silent and entirely occupied in attempting to rub the dirt out of his streaming eyes.

"Make it as quick as you can, Scott," called Charleton. Then to Douglas, "Get busy with the whiskey and coffee, Doug. He ought to be back by the time you've fixed up a snack."

But Scott was long in returning.

"Oughtn't he to be back?" asked Doug, when the bacon was ready.

Charleton looked at his watch. "He's been gone over

an hour. After you eat, you go see what kind of trouble he's in, Doug."

Douglas devoured the bacon and bread, then mounted and rode slowly through the silent, scented forest. His blue eyes danced with excitement, his tanned cheeks burned as he guided the Moose through the quivering aspens to the corral. Here he pulled up with a sudden oath. The corral was empty, the fence torn open in half a dozen places.

"That blankety-blank old bull must have started a stampede!" gasped Douglas. "I wouldn't have thought Scott would have left him free in here!"

He rode through and around the corral. Cattle tracks led in every direction. He trotted in widening circles. Perhaps a mile north of the corral, he pulled up and looked closely at the ground. Single cattle tracks here converged and a herd track led on northward. As he stared at it, the bull came thundering down the trail. Doug put the Moose after him but had not followed him for five minutes when Scott broke into the chase from the right.

"What do you think you've done, blank you?" he shouted. "What have you done with the rest of the herd?"

"Done with the herd?" roared Douglas. "What are you talking about?"

"I know you, you dogy rider, you! I told you that wild horse of yours would gum the game. There ain't a steer left! What do you mean by riding him into the corral?"

"You're drunk!" retorted Douglas. "You'd better ride after that bull or Charleton will pull a gun on you."

"Ride after nothing! Chase him yourself!"

"On second thoughts, I think I will. It's your turn

to play nurse. Go on back and tell Charleton what's happened."

"Don't get fresh, young fellow!" snarled Scott.

Douglas pushed back his hat and the noon sun glimmered through the pines on his yellow hair. His clear blue eyes studied Scott appraisingly. Finally, he said, "I guess, on third thoughts, I'll take you back to Charleton."

Scott laughed. "Now you're drunk!"

Douglas' six-shooter appeared casually between the Moose's twitching ears. "Hold up your little brown hands, Scott, till I reach me your gun. Fine! Now ride ahead of me till we reach Charleton. Some boy I am on the draw, eh, oldtimer?"

Scott swore, but rode ahead at a steady trot until they reached the noonday camp. Charleton looked at them in astonishment.

"Call this damn fool off my back, will you, Charleton?" drawled Scott. "He's mad because I called him for letting that wild cayuse of his stampede the herd."

"He's a liar! This is as good a cow-pony as he ever rode and better. Ain't a better horse in Lost Chief than this same Moose. He was after the bull like a hound after a coyote when Scott broke in on us, the dirty—"

"Hold on," interrupted Charleton. "What's your story, Scott?"

"The corral is broke in forty places and all the stock gone. I suppose this fool rode his wild horse into the herd and stampeded it. I found him running the bull like he and his horse was both loco."

Douglas uttered an oath. "Nothing of the kind! When I got there, the herd was gone and I'd just picked up the trail when the bull came along."

Charleton looked from one young man to the other.

Doug with his long face entirely expressionless, sitting easily sidewise in his saddle; Scott, face flushed, eyes angry, standing tense in the stirrups. There came an ugly twist to Charleton's lips, but after a moment he spoke coolly.

"You fellows help me up on Democrat and we'll beat it for home."

"But you don't believe the Moose—" began Doug. But Charleton interrupted.

"If I wasn't crippled I'd mighty soon show you fellows what I believed. As it is, I'm going home. But if I find either of you has double-crossed me, I'll square accounts."

There was that in Charleton's eyes which caused the two riders to dismount without a word. They heaved him into his saddle and, with his lariat, arranged a sling for his injured ankle. When they had made him as comfortable and secure as possible, Scott said politely:

"You don't need two of us, Charleton. I think I'll go after a bear I saw in the raspberry patch beyond the corral."

"Nothing doing, Scott!" grunted Charleton.

"You've fallen down on the job, Charleton," Scott laughed, "so you've lost your right to boss."

"No, he hasn't," said Douglas. "You come along!"

But this time Doug's six-shooter flashed no more quickly than Scott's. Charleton, his face twisted with pain, waited for a thoughtful minute before he said:

"Put up your guns, boys. Let him go, Doug," and he turned his horse eastward.

Douglas reluctantly returned his gun to his hip and Scott disappeared at a canter. The Moose followed after Democrat.

"What did you do that for, Charleton?" demanded

Douglas, resentfully. "That's just giving him the herd."

"If he has double-crossed me," returned the older man, "I'm in no shape to handle him just now. He never came back to meet you till he'd turned the herd over to an accomplice. In any case, I lose on this trick."

"But he didn't know you were going to meet up with a bull!"

"No, but he was going to keep us away from the corral, somehow. You remember he said he'd come back to get us to help him bring in some steers. Of course, you and he might be in cahoots on this, but Scott's tricky so I'm giving you some of the benefits of the doubt." Charleton turned in his saddle to favor Douglas with a suspicious stare.

"I didn't double-cross you, Charleton," said Douglas, not without a simple dignity that may or may not have impressed his mentor. At any rate, Charleton made no reply.

Douglas was entirely deflated. He drooped dejectedly in the saddle, guiding the stiff and weary Moose without interest. His wonderful expedition by which he was to establish his standing as a man with his father and Judith had ended in ignominy. He watched Charleton's painfully rigid back but he did not dare to speak to him until they were nearly home. As they neared the edge of the first line, the ground became tapestried with lilies, yellow, white and crimson. Tree-trunks turned blue against the blue skies that belled over the valley. As they descended, the Forest Reserve lifted gradually, a black green sea beyond the burning brown level of the ranches. But Douglas was in no frame of mind either to seek or to see beauty. He had a guilty sense that Charleton believed that he had failed him, and finally he

summoned courage to call, "Doggone it, Charleton! I wanted to put it over, don't you suppose?"

Charleton did not answer, and when they crossed the canyon back of Rodman's, Douglas, hurt and resentful, turned the Moose onto the home trail. He had gone almost beyond hailing distance before Charleton called, "Come down and see me soon, old cattle rustler!"

Instantly Doug's spirits soared. He waved his hand with a grin and put the Moose to a trot.

It was supper time when he clanked into the kitchen. His father and mother were at the table.

"You're early, Doug!" exclaimed John.

Doug nodded. "Where's Judith?"

"Keeping that mysterious date of hers. Maud, of course! She won't be home till late. I hope it's not with Inez. You look tired, Doug."

"I am. Jude makes me sick. She's harder to watch than a boy!"

John laughed enigmatically and went out to finish his chores. Shortly, Douglas followed him and told the story of the miscarried adventure.

"I told Charleton not to let Scott in on it," exclaimed John. "Serves him right. I sure got the laugh on Charleton this time."

"He's awful sore! Acts kind of suspicious of me," said Douglas ruefully.

"A guy like Charleton don't even trust himself." John pitched down a forkful of hay. "Have you any idea what Maud and Jude are up to?"

"No, sir. Are you worried about her?"

John laughed. "As long as Scott Parsons was with you, why worry? We'd ought to let Young Jeff run that crook out of the valley."

"I'll do it myself, some day." Douglas squared his

big shoulders as he spoke. He was still very thin and his clothes hung loose on him. But his father, looking him over, did not smile.

"Go to it, boy," he said.

Douglas had planned to lie awake until Judith returned. But the minute he touched his pillow he dropped into dreamless slumber from which he did not waken until breakfast time. John was scolding Judith when Doug reached the table.

"That's all right, to be so highty-tighty. You can get away with that with your mother but not with me. It was nearly three o'clock this morning when you came in."

"O, no, John! It wasn't that late," protested Mary anxiously.

"Now, Mary, don't put up one of your fool lies for the little devil. I know what time it was. What excuse have you, miss?"

Judith, who was looking tired, but singularly self-satisfied, answered demurely, "I was out on business, Dad. And I'm going to get pay for it, too. A horse that will really buck."

John's face was flushing when Douglas spoke. "Aw, let her keep her secret, Dad! I don't think she's done a thing but rope a stray pony."

Judith protested quickly. "Nothing of the kind! If you three just knew what I have done, you'd respect me. Anyway, Doug, I know where you were. Over on Fire Mesa with Charleton Falkner."

"Who told you that?" grinned Douglas.

"Somebody that knew. Dad, why don't you get after Doug like you do after me? What was he doing over on Fire Mesa, all night?"

"That's right, Doug! What were you doing on Fire

Mesa?" asked John, all a broad smile now that infuriated Judith.

She jumped up from the table, took down her milking pail and went out. Nor did she give Douglas opportunity to talk to her during the rest of the day. Not until twilight had settled in the valley did Douglas find her alone. Then, searching for her, he discovered her behind the corral, curled up against the new alfalfa stack, her eyes on the sunset glow above Lost Chief Peak.

Douglas sat down beside her. "I didn't mean to tease you, this morning, Jude. I was just trying to steer Dad off."

"But you always do think my stunts never amount to anything, Doug!"

"Have I said a word like that, lately? I can't help being anxious, can I, when a girl like you stays out until three in the morning?"

"Yes, you were so anxious your snores shook the house!" returned Judith. "Now admit, Doug, that you really think it was nothing worth worrying about."

"Well, I don't see how it could be anything so very important."

"There, I knew it! Doug, I'm so proud of myself that if I don't tell some one, I'll burst. Give me your word of honor you'll never give it away and I'll tell you."

"I swear I'll die before I'll peep!"

"Still think it's funny, don't you! All right, mister, prepare to faint! I was out helping Scott Parsons run cattle."

Douglas gasped.

"There, Doug Spencer! You're such a wonder! Of course," honestly, "I didn't do the hardest part. Scott had got 'em all together in a corral before I got there.

But I held the herd in a little canyon for a couple of hours while he got old Nelson off the scent. Then we drove 'em across the ridge, down into the desert country west of Mesa Pass. He's going to sell 'em in Mountain City and my share is a good bucking horse, like I told you."

Douglas sat perfectly still, so torn by conflicting emotions that for a time he was speechless. Finally, from the chaos of his mind rose an overwhelming anger.

"Do you think that's a decent thing to do? A girl, running cattle and with a confessed murderer at that? I sure am ashamed of you, Jude!"

"Can you beat a man!" cried Judith to the flaming heavens. "He won't even give me credit for being a cattle wrangler! And he says he loves me!"

Doug's voice was furious. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, stealing cattle and running round with that Inez Rodman!"

"You just be careful of what you say, Doug Spencer!"

"Careful! Why should I be careful You aren't careful!"

"I'm a whole lot better than you, at that! If it's so smart for you to do all these things, why isn't it for me?"

"A woman has to be good. It's her job to be good. If she isn't good in a cattle country like this, everything goes to pieces."

"It's a wonder you men don't set us women an example," said Judith coolly.

"Don't I try to keep you straight?"

"Yeh! A wonderful example you set me!"

Douglas' voice broke with anger. "Don't talk like a fool! The world isn't like that! The women have to be good. The men want 'em to be, no matter how hard

they try to make the women bad. And the more you care for a girl, the more you want her to be perfect."

"The world is plumb loco and you with it!"

"You're as cold as a dead rabbit!" exclaimed Doug.

Judith laughed mirthlessly. "Yes, I'm cold! I'm as cold as fire!" And suddenly she put her head down on her knees and burst into tears.

Instantly Douglas melted. He put his arms about Judith and drew her head to his shoulder. "O Jude! Don't! If I could only make you see it's my love for you makes me so mad!"

"You—you don't want me to have any fun!" sobbed Judith. "How'd you like to be asked to give up everything yourself and stay home like a woman?"

"I wouldn't like it. But a regular girl oughtn't to want to do such things."

"Why not? I like horses and dogs and the wind on Fire Mesa just as much as you do. And dancing and hunting by moonlight and getting away with somebody else's cattle and all of it. I love it! And you ask me to give it up because you want me to be good. What do you call good, anyhow?"

Douglas did not answer at once. In the first place, Judith's flushed cheek in his neck upset his equilibrium, and in the second place he was overwhelmed with a sudden consciousness of the truth of Peter's statement, that he had not a cleancut idea to his name.

But finally he stammered, "Well, I call being good not drinking or stealing or being loose with men or any of those things—for a girl."

"And for a man?" asked Judith, sitting erect.

"Aw, who wants a man to be good?" laughed Douglas.

"I do," replied Judith, with a sudden thrilling intensity in her young voice. "I want his strength to be as the strength of ten, because his heart is pure."

"Judith, you really do?"

"Yes, I really do."

Douglas drew a long breath. "Judith, would you want me to be that way?"

"I sure would."

"Well, then, Judith, so help me God, I will be!"

Judith put her slender, muscular hand on Doug's, swallowed hard once or twice, but said nothing. Then the tense moment past, she asked, "Honest, Doug, don't you think that was kind of a smart stunt of mine?"

"I certainly do," with heart-felt conviction. "But I want you to promise me one thing. That you won't run any more cattle. Will you, Jude?"

"I'll promise you, if you'll promise me," returned Judith promptly.

"But it's different with a man," repeated Douglas.

"But you promised about that other."

"That was different. It was something personal between you and me. The other is business."

"All right! I don't promise unless you do."

"I can't promise, Jude. Honest, I can't."

Jude laughed and jumped to her feet. "You are a goose, Doug, but I sure am fond of you." Then she left him.

Douglas sat still, his head pressed against the indescribable sweetness of the alfalfa hay, eyes on the wonder of the stars. Finally he said aloud, "I wish there was somebody a fellow could talk to that knows things. I wish my grandfather Douglas was alive. Peter jaws

too much. What I want is to know facts, then judge for myself."

His father passed by the haystack, pitchfork on shoulder. "Who are you talking to, Doug?" he asked.

"The biggest fool in Lost Chief," replied Douglas, rising and following his father to the house.

CHAPTER VI

LITTLE SWIFT CROSSES THE DIVIDE

"Ride 'em till they drop, then break another. That's what Nature does and that's what I do."

—*John Spencer.*

THE following afternoon when Douglas rode after the mail he went round by the west trail to call on Charleton. He found the crippled philosopher propped up in bed, reading the *Atlantic Monthly* and smoking a pipe. Mrs. Falkner and Little Marion were in the corral doing the chores.

"Well, how's the Moose after his disappointment?" asked Charleton.

"Going strong! Any news of Scott?"

"No; I don't expect any news for a week till I get on my feet."

"I guess we might as well let him go and try again without him," said Doug, looking out the door at Little Marion, who was astride a saddleless mule which was doing its best to climb the corral fence.

Charleton grinned. "No one can double-cross me without my taking the trouble to show him he can't do it twice, can they, Marion?" as his wife came in with an armload of wood she had just split.

"You are as revengeful as a wolf, if that's what you mean," replied Mrs. Falkner. "Not that you've tried it on me."

Charleton gave her an amused glance not unmixed with admiration.

"I don't know that even a wolf would tackle a lynx cat," he chuckled.

Douglas looked from the beautiful woman around the homelike room. "You're a lucky chap, Charleton," he said suddenly.

Mrs. Falkner had picked up her sewing-basket. "Nobody with a mind like Charleton's is so awful lucky," she said.

"Ouch!" grinned Charleton, and lighted his pipe afresh.

Douglas pondered on Mrs. Falkner's remark on his way back to the post-office. Peter was sitting on the doorstep with Sister. The mail had been distributed and most of Lost Chief had come and gone.

"That horse is tired, Doug," said Peter. "What have you been doing? Running him to break him?"

"Aw, he's all right," protested Douglas. "Don't climb a tree about him, Peter. I want to talk to you. Make Sister move over."

"Sister," said Peter, "don't you want to go down and speak nice to your old friend Prince?"

Prince, standing before the platform with slavering tongue, bright eyes shining, wagged his tail in a conciliatory manner. Sister sniffed, growled, whimpered, then walked deliberately down the steps and said something to Prince. He barked and they trotted over to the plains east of the post-office.

"She's got a dead coyote she keeps up there for her special friends," said Peter. "What's your trouble, Doug?"

Douglas sat down in Sister's place. "I've been over to see Charleton, and his wife said something that struck me as queer." He repeated Marion's comment.

Peter laughed. "The women in this valley beat any bunch I've seen anywhere. If the men were their equals,

there wouldn't be a spot in the world could touch Lost Chief. What do you think of Charleton's mind, Doug?"

"I think he's a wonder. He's lived, that guy."

"Any guy of forty has lived. It's the way they look at life that makes men different. Charleton hasn't any faith in anything good. That's why he's unlucky. Don't let him influence you too much, Doug. I like Charleton but he's not good medicine for a boy of your kind. Have you thought anything about my offer of a couple of months ago?"

"Not much. I'm putting in most of my time worrying about Jude."

"Has she been doing anything special?"

"Well, yes. If I could just make her care for me, it would be easy. But, Peter, she cares a lot more for that poor old broken down Swift than she does for me."

"She's just a child. You'll have to be patient, Doug."

"I am patient, Peter. But, in the meantime, Scott, or—" He hesitated, then went on. "I tell you, this caring for a woman who don't care for you is hell, Peter!"

Peter stared off toward Fire Mesa, with its rolling clouds of red, and answered seriously, "Yes, it is, Douglas. But I told you in June all that I could think of, in regard to Judith, and you got sore at me."

"Well, I'm not sore now. I was a fool. Here comes Jimmy Day. Give me my mail, Peter, and I'll beat it. I'm in no frame of mind to talk to a kid."

Jimmy, who was perhaps a year older than Douglas, pulled his sweating horse to its haunches. His dog, a mongrel collie, ran up the trail to meet the returning Sister and Prince. There was a whining colloquy, then the three dogs turned back.

"Must be a scandal somewhere," suggested Jimmy.

"No, just a dead coyote," said Peter. "Sister ran him down yesterday. Ain't a dog in the State outside of a greyhound can touch her."

Douglas made a flying leap into the saddle while the Moose whirled on his hind legs.

"Some horse, Doug!" exclaimed Jimmy. "I'll swap this and a two-year-older heifer for him."

"I'm afraid he might hurt you. He's a regular man's horse, Jimmy." Doug lighted a cigarette while the Moose reared.

"Thanks," grunted Jimmy. "Say, did you know Scott Parsons has had four young calves by one milch cow, all the same age? Ree-markable man, Scott. Say, I was by there the other day and there sat Scott in the corral on Ginger cracking a black snake at this fool cow to make her let those four slicks eat. He'll die rich, Scott will. He's the calf-gettingest rider in the Rockies."

Douglas turned the Moose into the home trail. When he reached the ranch, Judith was strolling in the main corral with her arm about the neck of the bull Scott had given her. He would follow Judith about like a pet dog but would allow no one else to touch him.

"When he is a little older, you won't be able to play with him that way, Jude," said Douglas, eying the pair with admiration not untinctured with apprehension.

It was a brilliant afternoon, with the western sun throwing long golden shadows across old Dead Line Peak. The corral with its fringe of quivering aspens a silvery lavender; the great red bull; the young girl with her noble proportions, rubbing the brute's ferocious head with one slender brown hand, made an unforgettable picture. The puppy, Wolf Cub, was chewing an old boot beside the alfalfa stack.

"He'll always be fond of me if I handle him right,"

said Judith. "Won't you, Sioux? I'm going to saddle him, some day, Doug."

"Well, not while I'm around," exclaimed the young rider, as he pulled the bridle over the Moose's head. "Say, have you seen Scott yet?"

"No. Why?"

"I pity him. Charleton sure is after him."

"Charleton? Why?"

Douglas shrugged his shoulders. "You ask Scott why," and he strode off to his chores.

Doug did not see Charleton again for several days. But one afternoon, about a week after the return from the hunt, they met at the post-office and Charleton, who wanted to see John, rode home with him.

"Scott is back," said Doug.

"Yes; I saw him yesterday." Charleton smiled. "I found out who was his helper on that little deal."

"You did! How?" Douglas' voice was so sharp that the Moose jumped nervously.

"I bought the information. Swapped him something for it."

"Who was it? Do you believe him?" Doug spoke a little breathlessly.

"I don't know. I'm going to check up on it now."

"Charleton, who did he say it was? Please, Charleton!"

The older man turned to look suspiciously at Doug. "How long have you known it?"

"You've no call to speak that way to me," cried Douglas.

"Humph! Well, he says it was that young devil of a Jude."

"Look here, Charleton, don't say anything to my father about it. He'll go crazy."

"I don't know what I'll do. I'll talk to Jude, first." And Charleton would say no more.

He found Judith in the milking shed, and while he talked to her there Douglas engaged his father's attention in the living-room. Here Judith swept upon them.

"Doug Spencer, as long as I live, I'll not speak to you again! You promise breaker, you—"

"Wait, Jude! I haven't told anybody. Did I tell you, Charleton?"

"I've told her that you didn't but she won't believe me," grinned Charleton.

"Scott wouldn't have told. Doug was the only one that knew!" Judith paced the floor.

"What the devil has broke loose?" demanded John.

"Now you have started something, Jude," groaned Douglas.

"Judith! Do calm down!" pleaded her mother, who had taken her hands out of the biscuit dough and now stood, twisting her fingers, in the doorway.

"Well," said Charleton, "I don't know any reason why I should keep quiet after the pretty names Jude has called me. It was Judith that helped Scott double-cross us up on Lost Chief Peak. She claims she didn't know it was our deal."

"She didn't, either!" cried Douglas stoutly.

John gasped, "Jude! She got away with your cattle, Charleton? That sure-gawd is funny! Jude! O Lord!" And John burst into a tornado of laughter that lasted until he dropped weakly on his bed.

Judith stared at him, uncertainly, as did her mother. Douglas scowled. Charleton lighted a cigarette.

"Of course, it has its humorous side," said Charleton, as John's shouts died down. "But I've served notice on

Scott and I serve notice on Judith now, that I'm not the man who kisses the hand that spoils his deals."

This remark sobered John. "You're right, too, Charleton. Jude, how'd you come to do such a fool thing?"

"How'd Doug and Charleton come to do such a fool thing?" asked Judith. "Scott and I had as good a right to run cattle off them as they had off Elijah Nelson."

"O Judith! Judith!" exclaimed her mother.

"You know how I feel about Scott Parsons!" cried John. "Jude, I'm going to punish you for this so you'll never forget it."

"In other words, if Doug runs cattle, he's admired. If I run cattle, I'm punished!" Jude's fine eyes were flashing, her tanned cheeks burning.

"Doug's a boy; you're a girl," replied John. "And I've told you to let Scott Parsons alone."

"I wish I were dead!" exclaimed Jude.

"Well," said Charleton casually, "I must be getting back home." No one heeded him as he clanked out the door.

"How are you going to punish Jude, Dad?" demanded Douglas.

"Doug," cried Judith, "you keep out of my affairs from now on! I'll show you that you can't break a promise to me."

"Judith, I tell you that I never breathed a word."

"I know better. Scott wouldn't be such a fool. And he told me not an hour ago that Charleton said you'd given me away. And, anyhow, I think more of Scott Parsons than I do of you and Dad put together! He's not always jawing at me. He thinks I'm just right as I am."

Douglas drew himself up, angry and offended.

"You'll come after me, miss, before I speak to you again!"

"That's exactly what I want!" retorted Judith.

During this dialogue, Mary stood with the tears running down her cheeks, begging the two to stop quarreling. John leaned against the table, his eyes half closed, his mouth distorted.

"So that's how the land lies with Scott?" he shouted suddenly.

"Yes, and if you lay hands on me, I'll shoot you," said Judith succinctly.

"I know how to get you, miss," sneered John.

He rushed out of the house. A moment later he galloped past the window on Beauty. Judith walked defiantly to the door and looked after him. Douglas went out to the corral. Shortly, John returned, leading Swift. He pulled up in front of the door and dismounted. He kicked Swift in the haunch to make her turn, and before Judith could do more than start toward him from the door, he put his six-shooter to Swift's patient little head and pulled the trigger. Swift dropped to her knees and rolled over.

"Now, Jude, try it again and I'll give Buster a dose," said John, standing tense as he waited for the girl's attack.

But with a look of such horror that John recoiled, she stopped in her tracks. She threw her arms about her head with a groan, ran across the yard to the stable and climbed into the hay-loft. Douglas stood for a moment as if turned to stone. Then he picked up a bridle and went into the corral for the Moose. As he adjusted the saddle, John led Beauty to the fence.

"You finish those chores, Doug!"

Douglas went on tightening the cinch.

"It was just a broken-down cow pony that should have been shot long ago," said John, sullenly.

Douglas leaped into the saddle, took the fence like a swallow, and was gone. Prince yelped on the trail before him.

Where he was going, Doug did not know. He thrust the spurs into the Moose and set him straight up the sheer barren side of Falkner's Peak until the Moose was winded, then he dismounted and led him up and up until they both were exhausted. Then Doug looped the reins over a clump of sage-brush and dropped to the ground. Prince squatted beside him, panting.

A blind despair had engulfed Doug. He could think of nothing to do. Nothing that would adequately punish his father, nothing that would solace Judith or bring her to her senses.

Nothing is so intolerably bitter to youth as its first realization of the fact that one is helpless to change life as it is. Douglas. biting his nails and railing at the heavens, was draining one of life's bitterest drinks. He was in deep trouble, utterly alone, and he had no spiritual star for guidance.

But when he finally descended the mountainside he had taken a resolve. He was going to leave home for a while. He was going to work for Charleton, who was greatly in need of a rider. He was not yet of age, but he was not afraid of John's forcing him to return.

His father and mother were in bed when he reached home. Judith's bed was empty. Douglas went out to the stable and climbed noiselessly to the loft. On the hay close to the open door lay Judith, her face dimly outlined in the moonlight. She was still sobbing in her sleep. Douglas stood looking down on her till his own eyes were tear-blinded. Then he knelt in the hay and

kissed her softly on the lips. She stirred but did not open her eyes, and he slipped back to the ladder and down, without a sound.

He went to bed at once but was up in the morning before his father, leaving a note on the kitchen table:

I am going to work for Charleton till things are better here at home.

Douglas.

He found Charleton grooming Democrat. "Charleton," he said, "you made a lot of trouble for Jude last night."

"What happened?" asked Charleton.

Douglas told him.

"That was a rotten trick!" exclaimed Charleton. "I just thought he'd lick her. John's got a mean temper."

"I want to work for you a while, Charleton. I'm sick of the rows at home."

"John willing?"

"I haven't asked him."

Charleton grinned. "I need a rider, sure. You finish currying Democrat while I go in and talk to the missis. Little Marion's visiting at Lone Bend. Maybe my wife will think it's too much cooking for two men." But he came back in a little while, smiling cheerfully. "Come on in to breakfast. It's all right."

So Douglas settled to riding for Charleton Falkner. His father did not come after him, and when the two met on the Black Gorge trail a day or so after Doug's departure, John returned Douglas' muttered greeting with a silent, ugly stare. There was comment and conjecture in Lost Chief, but the fall round-up was coming and this soon engrossed the attention of the community. Of Scott, Douglas saw nothing.

The fall slipped into winter, which in Lost Chief country begins in September, and Christmas passed with none of the Spencers at the schoolhouse party excepting Judith, who attended with Scott. February slipped into March and Douglas' eighteenth birthday passed unnoticed. The snows were too deep to allow Charleton to undertake any of those mysterious missions for which he was so much admired, and Elijah Nelson was allowed to flourish unmolested. It was reported that the Mormon had accused Lost Chief of running some of his cattle, but he evidently had no desire to start a controversy with the valley. And Douglas came more and more under Charleton's influence.

Peter Knight, watching the boy more closely than Doug at all realized, was deeply troubled by what he felt might permanently distort Doug's ideas of life.

"How are you and Judith making it, Doug?" Peter asked him one Sunday afternoon early in April, when he and the young rider were sunning themselves in the post-office door.

"You know Judith hasn't spoken to me since last August," replied Doug impatiently.

"Too bad!" grunted Peter.

"O, I don't know," replied Douglas. "I don't see much to this marriage game anyhow. Look at the couples round here and point me out any of 'em that's been married over five years that're really in love. Just a houseful of brats and a woman to nag you."

"Dry up, Doug! You are just quoting Charleton Falkner. I've heard plenty of his empty ideas in the last twenty years. You've worked for him long enough, anyhow. Better go back to your home; or if you're through with Jude, take my offer and go East to school."

"Forget it, Peter! As soon as Fire Mesa opens up,

I'm going after wild horses with Charleton. And you can roast him all you want to, but he knows life."

"Knows your foot!" snorted Peter. "If anybody could catch Charleton with his skin off, we'd find he gets happiness and sorrow out of the same things the rest of us do. He's just a big bluff, Charleton is."

"He's lived too much to let anything get him," said Douglas stoutly.

Peter laughed. "Nobody can accuse you of having lived too much, Douglas." Then he added soberly, "You're disappointing me a lot, Douglas. I never thought you'd let go of Jude."

"Jude let go of me," replied Douglas. "I suppose she thought I'd come running back to her, but she's mistaken. I'm through with women."

"Don't talk like an idiot, Doug," said Peter, after a long careful look at Douglas' face. "I know you. You are breaking your heart this minute for Judith. And she misses you a whole lot more than she'll admit."

"How do you know? Have you talked to her?" asked Douglas quickly. "How are things going up there?"

"Yes, I've talked to her. She's all right, but she's getting too many of Inez' ideas in her head. She says John doesn't say ten words a day. You'd better go back, Doug."

"Go back! With Jude believing I double-crossed her and nothing but rows going all the time? I'll admit I'm unhappy, but at least it's peaceful at Charleton's. He and his wife don't fight. I tell you that if home's just a place to fight in, I don't want a home."

"What do you want, Douglas?" asked Peter.

"I don't know," muttered the young rider.

"I know," said Peter softly. "You want a guiding

star, you want something that's not to be found in this valley, an ideal fine enough to save your soul alive. You come of stock that lived and died by a spiritual idea, Doug, and you are going to be unhappy till you find one."

Douglas turned this over in his mind soberly for a few minutes. "Have you got one, Peter?" he finally asked, wistfully.

"No! I might have had if your mother had lived. She was an idealist if ever there was one. Work yourself out a plan, Doug, that is based on something fine, then fight to put it over. That's the only way you'll ever be contented."

"What I want," cried Douglas, "is something to take away this emptiness inside of me."

"Exactly! And I'm telling you how. And the reason I know is because I started out in life with the idea that women and the day's work were enough. Maybe they are for a man like your father, though I doubt it. But a man like you or me isn't built for promiscuity either in love or in work. We are the kind that have to choose a fine, straight line and then hew to it, keep our faith in it, never leave it."

He paused for so long a time that Douglas stirred uneasily, then said, "How did you learn different, Peter?"

"By doing all the things that impulse and youth suggested, regardless of any suggestions or advice, and arriving at middle life with my mind and heart as empty as yours. Don't do it, Doug. It makes tragedy of old age."

Douglas rose slowly. "I don't see what in the world I can do with myself," he said heavily, and he rode back to Charleton's ranch.

Books had perhaps been Douglas' greatest solace that long winter. Charleton had a good many, mostly representing his young delvings into the realms of agnosticism. His later purchases simmered down to a few volumes of poetry. There were several of Shakespeare's plays around the cabin and these Douglas read again and again. He did not see much of Little Marion, who was a great gad-about, and who, when she was at home, was monopolized by Jimmy Day. Mrs. Falkner he found immensely companionable. She had a half-caustic wit which he enjoyed, but he liked best to have her argue with Charleton on what she called his dog-eat-dog theory of life.

He had reason, not long after his conversation with Peter, to recall the postmaster's comments on Charleton. Very early one morning Charleton roused him and told him to ride like forty furies after Grandma Brown.

Douglas obeyed him literally and arrived at the Brown ranch with the Moose in a sweating lather. When he banged on the door, Grandma, clutching her nightdress at the throat, put her head out.

"The baby, I suppose!" she snapped. "Is Little Marion there?"

"Yes!"

"Well, let me dress."

"Hurry, please, Grandma! Charleton seemed awful scared."

"Charleton! Huh! I'm going to get my proper clothes on and drink my coffee, no matter how Charleton Falkner worries. He always was a baby. You go saddle Abe."

Abe was saddled and the Moose was breathing normally before Grandma appeared, plump and calm. Nor

would she allow Abe to be hurried out of his usual gentle trot.

"Douglas, when you've seen as many new eyes open and old eyes close as I have, you'll quit hurrying," she said. "The Almighty generally looks out for mothers, anyhow."

So, sedately, in the glory of the sun bursting over the top of the Indian range, they trotted up to Falkner's cabin.

Charleton burst out of the door. "Where in the blank-blank have you been? Hurry, Grandma! I've been nearly crazy!"

"I'll bet your wife ain't crazy." Grandma dismounted with Doug's help. "Now, Douglas, you keep this lunatic outside, no matter what he says or does. It's just the way he acted when Little Marion came." She stamped into the house and closed the door.

"Let's go do the chores!" suggested Douglas.

"Chores! Chores! Don't you know that—"

"Yes, I know all about it," interrupted Doug. "Come on and get the milking done. Are you afraid your wife will die, Charleton, or what?"

"Or what!" gasped Charleton. "You poor, half-baked idiot!"

For an hour, Douglas sweated with Charleton. Then, as they rested for a time on the corral gate, the kitchen door opened and Grandma's head appeared.

"You go, Doug," said Charleton feebly.

But Grandma did not wait. "It's a boy, Charleton!" she shrieked. "A fine, big boy!" And she closed the door.

Charleton sat perfectly still on the fence. His lips moved but for several seconds no sound came forth.

Then he said, "Charleton Falkner, Jr.! Charleton Falkner, Jr.! All my life I've been waiting for this moment!" Tears were on his cheeks. "Doug, you go up and ask 'em how my wife is and give her my love."

Douglas stared at his mentor, wonderingly, unwound his long legs from the fence and crossed the yard. Grandma answered his timid rap.

"Charleton says how's his wife and sends his love."

"O, he does!" witheringly. "Why don't he go over to the post-office and telephone us? You tell him she did fine like she always does everything. You folks go up and get Peter to give you some breakfast."

'I'm not going near Peter till I see the boy and my wife!" called Charleton.

Grandma slammed the door.

"I wouldn't go near the post-office," said Douglas, established again on the fence beside Charleton.

"Why not?"

"If—if I felt like you do, I'd want to stay by myself, just take a ride alone up to the top of Fire Mesa."

"I don't care what I do as long as the boy's here. Charleton Falkner, Jr.! I'll tell you, Doug, you'll never know what happiness life can hold for you till a woman like Marion gives you a son."

"Say!" cried Douglas in an outraged voice. "What's all this talk you've been giving me for a year about whiskey and women and horses?"

Charleton did not hear him. "Charleton Falkner, Jr.!" he was murmuring over an unlighted cigarette.

It seemed a very long time before they were admitted to the baby and breakfast. Douglas was entirely unimpressed by the squirming red morsel of humanity that Little Marion proudly brought into the kitchen for their inspection. But Charleton was maudlin with admira-

tion. It was, it seemed, easily the first child ever born in Lost Chief, not excepting Little Marion who had been a wonderful baby herself.

Douglas listened, eating his breakfast grimly the while, filled with an embarrassed consternation at last beholding his mentor with, as Peter had said, his outer skin off.

This, then, was what Charleton really wanted; not whiskey, or promiscuous women, or wild horses, or Omar Khayham. What he wanted was a son, bone of his bone, flesh of his flesh, to carry on his name. And yet what had Charleton ever done to that name except to besmirch it? For Douglas now in his heart had no illusions about the proper nomenclature for his mentor's mysterious little deals.

"Charleton," he demanded suddenly, "do you want the kid to grow up to be just like you?"

Charleton looked at Douglas in astonishment. "Like me? Listen, Doug, old-timer, I'm going to spend the rest of my life licking out of him anything I see in him like me!"

Douglas gave up in despair and went out to finish the chores.

It was a disjointed day, of course. In the afternoon Charleton went to a choice gathering of spirits at the post-office; and Douglas, feeling particularly lonely and unsettled, rode up the south trail after three of Charleton's young mules which had strayed. He felt somehow that, with the dereliction of Charleton, the last hold he had on reality had gone.

CHAPTER VII

THE POST-OFFICE CONFERENCE

"Ride with your finger on the trigger—but smile before you shoot.'"

—*Sheriff Frank Day.*

DOUGLAS had no luck at all on his mule hunt. And as if to add to his discomfort, while climbing down the trail from the cemetery, he saw Judith on Buster, accompanied by the leaping Wolf Cub, overtake Scott Parsons and saw them race toward the post-office. Twilight came on, with the mud of the trail stiffening in the frosty air. An overpowering sense of loneliness urged Douglas across the valley and brought him to pause beside the Rodman corral. He dismounted at the buck fence and stood for a moment in the shadow of the Moose, wondering why he had stopped here. He had stood thus but a few moments when two riders came up the trail. They trotted into the door-yard.

"I don't think I want to dance, after all, Scott," said Judith's voice.

"What harm is there in it?" demanded Scott.

"I make it a point never to go in here except when Inez is alone."

"I suppose you're afraid to meet Doug!" exclaimed Scott. "He's here half the time."

Douglas leaped over the fence, rushed to Scott's side and struck him twice.

"That's a lie! Get down and fight with your fists,

you thief and murderer!" Doug's voice was low with passion.

There was a quick movement of Scott's right hand to his hip and Douglas felt a stinging pain in his left shoulder. Simultaneously with the shot, Scott put the spurs to Ginger, and Doug reeled as the mare's shoulder thrust against him. Judith jumped from Buster.

"Doug, did he get you?"

Douglas had not fallen. He pushed the girl aside and ran to the plunging Moose. Inez Rodman called from the door.

"Who's shooting?"

Still without speaking, Douglas threw himself on his horse and was off after the dim figure that raced down the west trail which led to the Pass. He did not heed Judith's call nor the quick patter of hoofs behind him. On and on through the frosty April night, Prince barking joyfully before, the Moose galloping at top speed, the stars sliding overhead. On past the Browns' noisy corral, past Falkner's brightly lighted cabin, and up the lifting trail to the Pass. The broken black line of the Pass, usually so clean-cut against the stars, looked wavering and uncertain. Douglas dropped forward and put his arms about the neck of the Moose.

Once in a while a horse is born with as much acumen as a mule plus the sensibility of a dog. The Moose, when he felt Doug's arms about his neck, dropped from a gallop to a trot and from a trot to a walk. Shortly, when Judith called, "Whoa-up, Moose!" he stopped and stood nickering uneasily. Judith dismounted and pulled the reins over Buster's head. Then she ran up to put her hand on Doug's knee.

"Doug! Doug! Where did he get you?"

"Don't hold me back, Jude!" said Douglas thickly.

"Tie me onto the Moose and leave me after him. I'm going to finish him, now."

"You can't catch him. You're hurt too bad. Let me take you home, Doug."

There was no reply for a moment. The Moose moved his head uneasily up and down. Then, breathing heavily and brokenly, Douglas said, "Not—while you—think I told—Charleton."

That was the last he knew for some time. When he returned to consciousness, Peter and Judith were half dragging him, half lifting him into the post-office.

"I don't care what you want, Jude," Peter was saying, "you aren't going to drag him another hour over the trail. We'll get him onto my bed and see how bad off he is."

"My shoulder!" grunted Douglas.

"All right, Doug! Now, Judith, one more heave onto the bed. Get off there, Sister. Jude, pass me that bottle of whiskey, then go lock the outside door so's no one can bother till I've finished. Then come back here."

Judith, her eyes wide and brilliant, her cheeks feverish, obeyed without a word. She drew off Doug's short leather rider's coat and cut off his blood-saturated shirt and undershirt. Douglas watched her with beads of sweat on his lips. Peter in the meantime had thrust his late supper back from the front of the stove and had put a couple of disreputable looking towels to boil in the dishpan. When Judith had finished and Doug's beautiful thin torso lay white against the dingy Indian blanket, Peter scoured his hands and examined the hole in the shoulder from which the blood pulsed slowly.

"It's gone clean through from front to back," said Peter cheerfully. "Guess I can fix him. Eight years in the regular service is useful sometimes. Come here

and hold him, Jude. I'm going to clean this hole with peroxide and he'll try to climb the wall."

"No, I won't! Go to it!" whispered Douglas.

Nor did he, for as Peter, with a piece of stove-pipe wire he had boiled as a probe, began his very thorough process of sterilization, Douglas quietly fainted. When he came to his senses, his shoulder was bandaged and Judith was pulling an old shirt of Peter's over his head.

"Now, Judith, make a fresh pot of coffee and drink some of it," said Peter. "You are as white as a sheet. How are you, Doug, my boy?"

"Fine! Peter, you get me drunk. I'm going after Scott to-night."

"Let's have the story." Peter's lips were grim. "You begin, Judith."

Judith set the coffee-pot on the red-hot stove and perched on the edge of the bed. She was wearing a middy blouse of dull blue. It was small for her and showed her fine shoulder and full-muscled throat and chest. She drew a deep breath and began at once.

"I was riding past Inez' place with Scott. He teased me to go in for a dance. When I wouldn't go, he asked me if I was sore at Inez because Douglas spent half his time there with her. Doug must have been behind his horse. He came out like a crazy man, called Scott a liar and told him to come down and fight, and hit him. Scott drew on him and shot him. Then he rode away like mad, and Doug after him. I followed and caught Doug part way up the Pass and brought him here."

Judith paused and Peter turned to Douglas. "All correct, Doug?"

But the young rider was staring at Judith. "Did you believe Scott, Judith?" he demanded.

"How do I know what you've been up to? You were there to-night."

"I hadn't seen Inez. I haven't been near her place since I made you a promise, once. I went over to-night because I was discouraged. I'd made up my mind that there wasn't anything real about anybody. Even Charleton isn't real. Now, Peter, you give me a quart of whiskey and help me onto the Moose. I'll—"

"You'll calm down, that's what you'll do," said Judith succinctly. "Won't he, Peter? When Scott finds he hasn't killed you, he'll be back and then you can settle with him. Peter, you telephone my mother I'm going to stay down here for a while and take care of Doug."

Peter hesitated. "I don't need you, Jude, though of course, it'll be pleasant to have you here."

"It's just as well you feel that way," said Judith, "because I intend to stay, anyhow."

Douglas blinked round eyed at Judith, then smiled seraphically and closed his eyes. He was asleep before Peter had succeeded in getting Mrs. Spencer on the telephone. All Lost Chief was on a party line and he carried on his conversation not without difficulty. Judith sat listening with a broad grin of appreciation.

"Hello, Mary. This is Peter Knight. Doug had an accident and I have him here with me—O, Inez telephoned you. Well, Judith overtook him and brought him here. He's in no particular danger—That you, Grandma? How's Marion?—No, it was Scott drew on Doug.—Wait a minute till I finish with his mother.—Listen, Mary! Don't get excited—You keep quiet, Inez. —Everybody butt out! Now, listen, you folks, if you've got to, but don't interrupt!—Scott said something that riled Doug and Doug hit him. Scott drew and got Doug through the left shoulder, bad, but clean, and

I've got the wound dressed.—Say, if you women don't keep quiet, I'll sure-gawd hang up. O, hello, Charleton! Yes, Scott made a clean get-away.—Now, listen, Mary. I'm going to keep Judith here to-night to help me and you can come down to-morrow.—Yes, that you, John? Well, you come along now, but not Mary. She's too weepy.—What's that you say, Inez? The sheriff and Jimmy gone out after Scott? When did they start—Hello, Mrs. Day. Half an hour ago? That's good. Now, listen, John. You stop by here before you go crazy. Understand me? All right! Good-night, everybody!"

He turned from the telephone with a wry smile. "John's coming down."

"He's been worse than a wolverine since Doug left," said Judith.

"How do you and he get along?" asked Peter, sitting down to his belated supper.

"O, I patch along for Mother's sake. But it's no way to live! I don't see what Dad gets out of his own ugliness."

"You'd probably find out, if he'd tell you the truth, that John doesn't consider himself ugly-tempered. He'd admit he was firm and misunderstood and unappreciated." Peter smiled grimly.

Judith laughed. "Well, thank heaven John doesn't belong to me, and I don't belong to him!" She sipped a cup of coffee slowly, her eyes on Douglas in his uneasy sleep.

He was still asleep when John came in. He nodded to Peter then strode over to the bed, where he stood for a moment scowling down at his son, his lower lip caught between his teeth. Douglas opened his eyes.

"Douglas," said John hoarsely, "before I go out after

Scott, tell me all is straight between you and me. Judith made up, long ago."

"That's a whopper!" exclaimed Judith. "I'll never forgive you as long as I live! I'm just sticking round for Mother's sake. My mother that once could ride an unbroken mule. When I think of that—" She paused as Peter laid a hand on her arm.

"It's not a matter of making up," said Douglas. "It wasn't a thing you could make up. It was just one more fact to knock a fellow's faith in life's being a straight deal."

John did not answer for a moment, but something very like a blush rolled over his tanned face. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he felt that he had done something shameful. But he made no admission.

"You'll come home and let us nurse you, Doug?" he asked when the blush had gone.

"I guess I'd better stay with Peter. I never want to come home while Judith believes I squealed to Charleton."

"Jude doesn't believe anything of the kind. She's just a flighty, fool girl."

"Thanks, dear Father!" sniffed Judith.

John did not glance at the girl. He was watching Douglas eagerly. "I thought it was me that kept you away from home. I can make Jude apologize as soon as I get Scott back here. If I clear that up, then will you come home, old boy?"

"Yes, I guess so. But that won't keep me from settling with Scott for to-night."

"Sure! But you get well, Dougie!" John turned from the bed with the look of sullenness wiped as by magic from his face.

Douglas stared at Judith. His mind was confused

but he realized that the loneliness and despondency of the day was gone. He was blindly angry with Scott yet grateful to the event which had brought Judith to his aid.

John held a low-voiced colloquy with Peter as to the nature of Douglas' wound; then with a cheerful good-night, he went out. Douglas closed his eyes.

"You fix yourself up a bed on the floor, Judith," said Peter. "I'll keep the fire going and an eye on Douglas. To-morrow you can take your turn."

Judith answered pleadingly, "I'm not tired or sleepy, Peter. And I almost never get a chance to talk alone with you. Let me sit up with you!"

Peter's long, harsh face softened. "All right, Jude! We'll keep the old coffee-pot going and make a night of it. Then—"

He was interrupted by the sound of wordy altercation among the dogs outside. Judith cocked a knowing ear. "Wolf Cub's in trouble! I'd better let him in, Peter. He and Sister will snarl and quarrel all night. They get along about like Dad and I do."

"It'll break Sister's heart, but go ahead. I always tell her, guests first," said Peter.

Judith opened the door a crack and whistled. There was a rush outside of many paws, and Wolf Cub's long gray muzzle appeared in the narrow orifice. There was a scramble, a yip from Wolf Cub, and he was inside, licking Judith's hand and trying to climb into Peter's lap at the same time. He was two-thirds grown now and as big as a day-old calf. Judith gazed at him with utter pride. "Isn't he a lamb, Peter? Now, you get over in the corner, Wolf, and don't let me hear a sound from you to-night!"

The great puppy looked up into her face with ears cocked, then turned slowly and crept into the corner

indicated and with a groan lay down. Peter jerked his head in admiration.

"You are some person, Jude! Keep boiling water going. I'm going to wash that wound of Doug's every hour. This cattle country is the devil for infection."

"Oughtn't we to take him up to Mountain City?" asked Jude, in sudden anxiety. "We could get Young Jeff's auto."

"At the first sign of trouble, I will," replied Peter. "But I think I've had more experience with gunshot wounds than Doc Winston's had."

There was a renewed sound of scratching and whining at the door. Douglas opened his eyes. "Better let Prince in long enough to see that I'm all right," he said.

Peter groaned. "Another insult to Sister! However, if he and the pup won't fight—"

"I'll answer for Wolf Cub." Judith tossed a warning glance at the corner where gray ears were twitching restlessly.

Peter opened the door carefully. Sister and Prince stormed in. There was a mix-up, during which the pup did not stir from his corner and Sister was shoved out the door, snapping at Prince as she went. Prince wagged his tail at Judith and Peter, then put his forepaws on the bed and gazed anxiously at Douglas. He sniffed at the wounded shoulder, wriggled and gave a short, sharp bark.

Doug opened his eyes. "It's all right, Prince."

Prince licked Doug's cheek.

"So that's understood," said Peter, taking Prince by the collar, "and you can just step out and talk it over with gentle little Sister."

Douglas closed his eyes again. Judith sat down on the floor, her back against the bed. Peter lighted his

pipe and put a fresh panful of towels on to boil, before settling himself in his homemade armchair.

"I understand Scott gave you a little blue roan that's a real bucker," he said.

"He didn't give him to me. It was pay for some work I did for him."

"Uhuh! What do you aim to do with him?"

"Keep him unbroke for the Fourth of July rodeo. And, Peter, I'm going to enter my Sioux bull for some stunts."

"Dangerous work, I'd say. What kind of stunts?"

The young girl chuckled. "You wait and see! That Sioux weighs a good two thousand pounds and he thinks he's a bear cub!"

"Bear cub! I don't know what John Spencer's thinking of!" grunted Peter.

"John doesn't think. He just feels," said Judith. There was a short silence which the girl broke by saying, "Peter, were you ever in love?"

The postmaster took his pipe from his mouth, stared at Judith's earnest eyes, put the pipe back and replied, "Yes."

"How many times?"

"How many times? Can you really be in love more than once, Judith?"

"Now, what's the use of saying that to me, Peter? I'm not a baby!"

"In many ways you are," returned Peter, serenely. "Why this interest in love? What's his name?"

"I'm not sure it's any one. But of course I think a lot about it. You aren't laughing, are you, Peter?"

"God forbid! I feel much more like crying."

Judith smiled up at him, doubtfully.

"Crying?"

"Yes; you are so young, Jude. I hate to think of your dreams going by you."

"Well, I'm not such a kid as you think I am. I'll bet I know all there is to know about love."

"My God, Judith, you don't even know the real thing when it's offered you. All you know is the rot you've seen all your life. Love!" Peter snorted derisively.

Judith gave a little shiver of excitement. "Well, if you know so much about love, Peter, what is it?"

"I don't know what it is, except that all of it, every aspect of it, understand, is bred right here." He tapped his forehead. "It begins in the brain, not in the body. Love is not lust, Judith."

Judith scowled thoughtfully. Peter let the thought soak in; then he said ,"And when real love comes, it takes possession of your mind and turns it into heaven and hell."

"Is that the way it came to you, Peter?"

"Yes!"

"How many times?"

"Twice. And I wouldn't want to endure it again."

"There's a poem like that," said Judith, somewhat blushingly. "Do you mind poetry? I read lots of it."

"One should at sixteen," returned the postmaster. "No, I don't mind poetry. What were you thinking of?"

Judith, still blushing, gave a cautious glance at the bed and began:

"He who for love hath undergone
The worst that can befall,
Is happier thousandfold than he
Who never loved at all.

A grace within his soul hath reigned
Which nothing else can bring.
Thank God for all that I have gained
By that high suffering!"

Peter, watching Judith with something deeply sad in his blue eyes, nodded when she had finished. "Youth!" he muttered. "Youth!"

"Do you believe it, Peter?" demanded Judith.

"Yes, I do. Girl, how much high suffering will you get out of your goings on with Scott?"

"None at all, Peter."

"I wish I were twenty years younger," said Peter.

"If you were twenty years younger you wouldn't be as wise as you are now."

"And what happiness has wisdom brought me?" exclaimed Peter.

"It must be mighty fine to really know things," said Judith.

"What kind of things?"

"O, love and all that kind of thing."

"I'd like a drink of water, please!" Douglas opened his eyes.

"Have you been listening, Douglas?" demanded Judith.

"I don't think I missed any of it," Doug smiled. "You're growing up, Jude."

Judith tossed her head. "I think it was rotten of you to listen to my conversation with another man!" And although she and Peter talked in a desultory way until dawn, the vasty subject of love was not mentioned again.

About ten o'clock the next morning Charleton Falkner came to see Douglas. He hardly had established himself when the thunder of many hoofs sounded without, a wrangling of dogs began, and John Spencer thrust open the door to Peter's living quarters. He was spattered with mud from head to foot. So was Scott Parsons, who followed him, as well as Sheriff Frank Day and Jimmy Day, who brought up the procession.

Judith, who had been washing dishes, hastily dumped the dish-water out of the window. Charleton, with his familiar, sardonic grin, propped Douglas up on a pillow.

"What're you bringing him in here for, John?" demanded Peter harshly. "Doug's in no state for a row."

"I don't know why not!" exclaimed Douglas coolly. "I don't have to talk or listen with my shoulder. Where'd you pick him up, Dad?"

"Never mind that!" replied John impatiently. "He's here. What do you want done with him, Doug?"

All eyes focused on Scott. In mud-spattered chaps and leather coat, his sombrero on the back of his head, a cigarette hanging from his hard, handsome mouth, Scott leaned easily against the table, eying Judith. Douglas looked from Scott to Judith and from Judith out of the window where beyond the yellow green of rabbit bush that carpeted the valley there lay the green shadow of the Forest Reserve. After a moment's thought he said:

"What made you draw on me like that, Scott?"

"I thought you'd pulled your gun."

"I punched you right and left. You knew I hadn't pulled a gun. As far as I'm concerned, you're too free and easy with that six-shooter of yours."

"Me, too," agreed the sheriff, scratching Prince's ear.

"He's the gun pullingest guy in the Rockies," volunteered Jimmy.

"All I want to say," Doug announced, "is that when I get use of my shooting arm again, I'm going to pot Scott on sight."

Peter looked at Douglas' tanned face beneath the tumbled golden hair.

"Let's sit down," said Peter, "and go over this thing carefully. Scott's leading with the wrong foot in this

valley, but I don't know as shooting him on sight is the answer."

Scott and Jimmy perched on the table, John and Judith on the foot of the bed. The others found chairs. Doug stared at Peter, at first with resentment, then with an air of curiosity.

"Don't you try any soft stuff, Peter!" protested John. "Scott's worn his welcome out in Lost Chief and that's all there is to it."

"My folks came here a year before yours did, John," retorted Scott. "I've got as good a right in this valley as anybody."

"Nobody that makes a nuisance of himself has got any rights in this valley," asserted Douglas. "I suppose you think because your grandfather killed Indians here you've got a right to shoot white men. Well, sir, I'm going to teach you different."

"Pot-shooting at him isn't going to teach him anything except perhaps what is over the Great Divide, Doug," said Peter dryly.

Scott laughed sardonically.

"The law has got something to say in this case," announced the sheriff, lighting a small black pipe.

"No, it hasn't," exclaimed Douglas; "not if I don't want it to."

"You aren't the whole of Lost Chief, Doug," said Charleton. "I've got a small grudge to settle with Scott, myself."

"And I've got several," added John.

"Enjoy yourself, folks," suggested Scott, winking openly at Judith over the cigarette he was lighting.

This infuriated John. "Jude, you clear out! Scott, you blank-blank—"

Douglas flung up a protesting hand. "O, cut that,

Dad! Judith, you stay right where you are. You're at the bottom of this whole trouble and I want you to see and hear it."

"Draw it mild, Douglas!" protested the postmaster.

"Don't bother about me," said Jude. "I sure-gawd can take care of myself."

"What happens next?" inquired Jimmy Day.

Nobody spoke for a moment; then very deliberately, Peter turned to the sheriff.

"You remember Doug's mother, don't you, Frank? I can't help thinking how much he looks like her, today, although he's the image of John."

"Remember her! I tried for five years to get her to marry me. But her old dad wouldn't stand for it."

"You mean she couldn't see you because of me, Frank!" exclaimed John, a sudden light in his handsome eyes.

Douglas again favored the postmaster with a contemplative stare.

"Some old wolf, her dad, I've heard," Peter went on.

"He was," agreed the sheriff. "He ran the valley and he ran it right. Every Fourth of July he made a speech about making Lost Chief the Plymouth Rock of the West."

Charleton Falkner roared. "I rememer those speeches!"

Peter was grinning. "But in spite of them, from what I've heard I believe he came mighty near being a great man, old Bill Douglas."

"What did he lack?" demanded Douglas suddenly.

"Religion!" answered Peter, promptly.

"Religion? What's that?" asked John with a guffaw. "You never had any, Peter."

"Right!" agreed Peter. "Worse luck for me that I

didn't have that kind of a mind. But I know any kind of a social idea fails without it. And I know if old Bill Douglas had built a church up there beside the schoolhouse, the chances are that Scott wouldn't have plugged Douglas last night. And mind, I don't believe in God, or the hereafter, or any of the dope they drug you with."

"What the hell are you driving at, Peter?" demanded Charleton.

"Say," shouted John, "is this a trial or a sermon?"

"It's neither," replied Peter. "We're just talking things over. My idea is that Doug shall sort of sit in judgment on Scott and the rest of us abide by his decision."

"Now, listen here!" exclaimed Scott. "This may be a funny joke, but I don't see it!"

Charleton laughed. "I'm with you, Peter. Only that won't pay my grudge."

John laughed too, with a little glance of pride toward his son's set, white face. "I'm on! Make it include his leaving Jude alone."

"Aw, you folks act plumb loco!" snarled Scott.

"Wait and see! Wait and see!" protested Peter. "And while Doug thinks it over, let me add something to what we were saying about old Bill Douglas. He used to act as a kind of unofficial judge in the valley?"

The others nodded.

"Did he ever," Peter went on, "make an important decision that he didn't try to look to the good and the future of Lost Chief? At least, I gathered that from the things Doug's mother used to tell me about the old man's pipe dreams."

John spoke soberly. "He was a just man. They don't make 'em that way any more."

"He was more than just," insisted Peter. "He was forward looking. But he led with the wrong foot. He laughed at the church."

"Sure he did," agreed Charleton. "Why not? Remember old Fowler? A fine sample of the church!"

Peter rose and paced the floor a minute. "Let me tell you folks something. I laugh at the cant they've wrapped the church up in. But I don't laugh at the system of ethics Christ taught. I'm here to tell you folks, He put out the finest, most workable system of ethics the world has ever known. And folks can't live together without a system of ethics."

"It's a wonder you don't subscribe to 'em, Peter," jibed Charleton.

"It's too late. But that don't say that I don't realize clearly that I've failed in life because of it. What do you say to that, Charleton?"

Charleton's lips twisted.

> "Why all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd
> Of the two Worlds so wisely—they are thrust
> Like foolish Prophets forth: their Words to Scorn
> Are scattered and their mouths are stopt with Dust."

John laughed. Peter shrugged his shoulders and said, "Suit yourselves. As for me I believe everybody is destined sooner or later to deal squarely with right and wrong. Sooner or later every community has to wrestle with the question of social ethics, or fail. Fate has written it of Lost Chief. You'll see."

"I'm with you there." Frank Day spoke soberly. "I believe in fate. You can't ride these hills and not. It's all written beforehand."

Douglas cleared his throat. "I've got an idea," hesitatingly. "I've been thinking for a long time that somebody in Lost Chief that has a homestead right ought

to homestead that shoulder of Lost Chief mountain that cuts off Elijah Nelson from our valley. If we don't, he will. I can't do it because I'm not of age. But Scott can, and he can find plenty of work for that six-shooter of his, worrying the Mormons and keeping 'em out of Lost Trail. I'll agree to let Scott alone if he'll let me alone and undertake that job."

There was silence, Scott staring at Douglas with a mixture of contempt, belligerency and surprise in his face.

"But," protested John, "that's no punishment, and it don't say a thing about Judith!"

Douglas shifted his feet impatiently. "I'm not going to punish any guy for running after Jude. That's a fair fight. What I'm sore about is his lying about me and shooting at me when I wasn't armed."

"I'd planned," said Scott gruffly, "to try to buy back our old place from the Browns. They've got more than they can carry and I'm sure getting nowhere renting that piece from Charleton."

"And," suggested Charleton with a grin, "if you encourage those broncos of yours, they each might have three or four slicks every spring, and if you keep up practice with the blacksnake on the old milch cow—"

"Dry up, Charleton!" exclaimed Peter. "What do you think of the idea, Frank?"

"It ain't bad," answered the sheriff slowly, "though I ain't afraid of the Mormons coming in."

"That's where you are wrong," said Charleton. "They are going to get Lost Chief Valley by any straight or crooked method they can think up. With an ornery devil like Scott to climb over, they won't try to come in that entrance, that's sure."

"How about it, Scott?" asked the sheriff.

"I'd just as soon, and I'd just as soon say that I sure went crazy when Doug gave me those two good ones and I did what I wouldn't have done if I'd taken time to think."

"Well," grinned Douglas, "nobody is going to kick if you don't take time to think over in the Mormon valley."

Sheriff Day rose with a laugh. "I've got to get to the alfalfa field I'm plowing. Come on, Jimmy."

Jimmy rose to his good six feet of height and pulled on his gloves. "I feel like I'd been praying," he said. "That is, if I'd ever heard a prayer, I'd say so." He made a face at Judith and followed his father.

John Spencer looked from Douglas to Peter and from Peter to Charleton with a little lift of his chin. Then he said, "When are you coming home, Doug?"

"Not till Jude believes I didn't tell on her last summer."

"I'll get the truth out of Scott!" exclaimed John, drawing his six-shooter.

"Aw, put it up, John, you feather-brain you," drawled Scott. "I told Charleton, Jude. He paid me for the information. I never supposed he'd hold it against a girl."

Judith turned very red. "Scott Parsons, I hope you go up that Mormon valley and that they get you, you blank-blank double-crosser you!"

Scott shrugged his shoulders. Judith glared at each of the men in turn. "I hate you all, every one of you!" she cried. "What chance has a girl among you? You're just like a lot of coyotes after a rabbit!"

"Rabbit! Say lynx-cat, Jude!" laughed John.

Judith tossed her head and rushed out of the room.

The men laughed hugely as she banged the door. Only Douglas remained sober.

"Well," said John, "I suppose you'll be home in a day or two, Doug."

"If Charleton can find some one I will be."

"I'll give him half time," volunteered Scott.

"Nothing doing!" replied Charleton. "Nobody gets a second chance to double-cross me!"

Scott flushed angrily but shrugged his shoulders. Charleton went on, "Of course, Charleton, Jr. won't be able to ride for a month or so but Jimmy Day will help me out in the meantime."

"Son smoke yet?" asked Peter.

"No; I have to spend so much time doing jury duty on my neighbors, I haven't got round to teaching him. He weighs a big ten pounds, the little devil."

"Come on, let's get out," said Scott.

They clanked out, leaving Douglas alone with Peter, and he fell into a long sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

JUDITH AT THE RODEO

"If you break the heart of a thoroughbred, she doesn't even make a good cart horse."

—*Mary Spencer.*

LATE in the afternoon, when Douglas awoke, Judith was sitting beside the bed, chin in palm. Peter was not to be seen. Douglas stared at the young girl until her gaze lifted from the floor and she smiled at him.

"Judith," he said, "it's been a long time, hasn't it?"

Judith nodded. "I've been sitting here thinking how much you've changed. You were just a boy, last summer. Now you look like a man, lying there."

"You've changed yourself. Jude, you're going to be very beautiful."

Judith chuckled. "You and Scott agree on one point, then!"

"Jude! Honestly, I don't see how you can stand that crook!"

"He's a woman's man," said Judith shortly.

"I can't see it!"

"Don't let's quarrel the first thing, Douglas. How is Little Marion?"

"Same as usual. Did you know that she is engaged to Jimmy Day?"

"I knew she ought to be," said Judith bluntly. "They sure make a good-looking pair! When will they be married?"

"When Jimmy has got a good start with his herd.

Judith, Charleton isn't a bit like I thought he was."

"He's an ornery mean devil, if you ask me," said Judith succinctly. "He's the worst influence that ever came into your life."

"Did Peter say that?"

"No; I said it. You are too good to waste on Charleton. What has finally waked you up about him?"

"He's always talked to me against marriage and women and children and everything like that. Said awful hard things about 'em, Jude. He really got me to the point this winter where I felt as if marriage was wrong. But do you know, when the boy was born, yesterday morning, he just went plumb loco. He cried and was sentimental like these young fathers you read about in books."

Judith's great eyes widened incredulously. "He was!" She turned this over in her mind for some time, then shook her head. "I give it up. I can't understand men at all. I thought I had Charleton's number. I always did agree with him about marriage."

Douglas drew a quick breath. If men were difficult to understand, how much more so were women, particularly of Judith's type! One never got to the end of them.

"How do you mean that, Judith?" he asked.

"I mean I'd rather be dead than married. Just look at the couples we know, Doug! Just look at 'em!"

"I'm looking at 'em! What's the trouble?" demanded Doug.

"They don't love each other any more. That's all!" Judith tossed her head knowingly.

"Pshaw! How do you know?"

"Because I've watched them for years and studied

about it. There is nothing in marriage, Doug. No, sir!"

"Pshaw! And you were sitting and quoting love poetry to Peter last night!"

"Yes, I was! Certainly! I'm not idiot enough to say there's no such thing as love. But I do know that a few years of marriage kills it. Yes, sir!"

Douglas eyed her wistfully. She was so vivid. Yes, vivid, that was the word. Her eyes glowed as if her brain glowed too, and her lips were so full of meanings, too changing and too subtle for him to read. If only they could work out this strange enigma of life together!

"They can't hold out against the years," Judith repeated dreamily. "It's as if love was too delicate for every-day use. They get over caring."

"I wonder why?" said Douglas.

"I think people get sick of each other, Doug! Why, I think a lot more of you, since you've been away for a few months. And I get tired of my own mother, bless her dear old heart, and I love her to death. But she's my mother and I can't stop loving her. But I certainly couldn't stand a man around the house, year after year. No marriage for me! No, sir!"

"But what will you do about love?" asked Douglas.

Judith's burning eyes grew soft. "Cherish it," she answered in a low voice. "Keep it forever. Never murder it by marriage. It's the most wonderful thing that comes into human life."

Douglas smiled sadly. "You talk as if you were a thousand years old, Judith, on the one hand and like a baby on the other. What will you do, marry without love? Somehow the children have got to be cared for by responsible parties."

"Responsible parties!" Jude was derisive. "Do you call Dad a responsible party?"

"He's fed and clothed us."

"What does that amount to?" said Judith largely. "An orphan asylum would do that. The kind of parents kids need are the ones that will answer your questions. I mean the real questions. The ones we don't dare to ask."

"About life and sex and all those things!" Doug nodded understandingly. There was silence, then Doug shook his head. "I don't know how things would go along without marriage. Just you wait until you fall in love and see how you feel. You'll want to marry just like all the rest of us."

"Never! I'm with Inez on that!"

"Inez!"

"Yes, Inez! She's got more sense about living than all the women in this valley put together. And she knows life."

Douglas sighed. "What are some of Inez' ideas about marriage?"

"Well, she just says it won't do! She says that the children have got to be taken care of but that it isn't fair to put the curse of marriage on parents. And she says her way isn't the answer, either, but that anyhow it's honest, which is a darn sight more than a lot of marriages in Lost Chief."

Judith paused to take breath and Douglas asked, "Say, now listen, Jude, was Inez ever in love?"

"She says she's in love right now but she won't say who he is."

"I don't believe she knows what love is! Her ideas aren't worth anything. I've lost faith in these folks that

tell you they know life. They're exactly like the rest of us under their skins. I'm getting to believe that we all get happiness in the same way and over mighty few things. Loving and having children, that's about all."

"Inez says it's nothing of the kind; that the only way to be happy is to know what is beautiful when you see it."

"I suppose that's smart," said Douglas crossly, "but I haven't any idea what it means."

"I know what it means; but you never will until you can ride across Fire Mesa with your heart aching because it's so beautiful."

"I don't see where in the world you get the idea that I don't see the beauty in things!" protested Douglas. "I can't gush like a girl and quote poetry, but this sure is a lovely country to me. And I want my children's children to have this valley and hold it till the very bones of their bodies are made out of the dust of Lost Chief. That's how I feel about these old hills. More than that, I can see how a marriage here in Lost Chief might be a life-long dream of beauty."

Judith looked at Douglas with astonishment not unmixed with admiration. But she returned sturdily to her own line of defense.

"Doug, do you see any beautiful marriage around here?"

Douglas stared at her tragically, then answered with a groan: "No, I don't! But," with new firmness, "that's not saying I don't firmly believe I couldn't make marriage a lovely thing."

"Why, do you think you are cleverer than anybody else?"

"Not clever, but—but—" Douglas paused, powerless to tell Judith of that something within him that

suddenly told him that his fate was to bring to Lost Chief the thing of the soul it never had had. How or what this was to be, he did not know.

After a time, he said softly, "Judith, were you ever in love?"

Judith returned his look with a curiously impersonal glance. "I'm not sure," she answered slowly. "Not what Inez calls love, that's sure."

"Isn't there any other woman in Lost Chief that could give you ideas except Inez?" asked Douglas impatiently.

"What woman would you suggest?" Judith waggled one foot airily and tossed her head.

"Charleton's wife. She has brain and she's interesting."

"She's too old. I mean she looks at everything from an old-fashioned viewpoint. I wouldn't care what her age was if she could just see things the way they look to a person sixteen or seventeen years old. Now, Inez is awfully modern."

"Modern!" snorted Douglas. "Where'd you read that? It sure is a new word for Inez' kind!"

Judith flushed angrily but was denied a retort, for Peter suddenly appeared in the door.

"What in the world do you children mean by this kind of talk?" he shouted. "I couldn't help hearing while I was sorting mail. What do you mean by thinking such thoughts, Judith? Have you the nerve to admit that you are patterning your ideas on a woman like Inez?"

"I don't care what she is," replied Judith obstinately. "She's the only woman in Lost Chief who can talk about anything but babies and cattle raising. And more than that, and anyhow, I like her."

Peter took a turn or two up and down the room.

"I don't object so much to your liking her," he said, "as I do to your absorbing her cynical ideas."

"Pshaw, Peter! I don't notice you're displaying a wife and a happy home for us to copy after!" sniffed Judith. "What I want you old people to do is to show me by example how practical and true all these fine old precepts are that you are so free about laying down for us kids. Where's your happy marriage, Peter?"

Peter's lips twisted painfully. "My happy marriage is in Limbo, Judith, with the rest of my dreams. As for being old—why, Jude, I'm still in my forties."

"Forty!" gasped Judith.

"Yes, forty; and if I hadn't been a fool I'd still be facing the most useful part of my life. Heaven knows, children, I'm not offering myself or any one else in Lost Chief as an example to you."

"What do you offer?" asked Jude with an impish smile.

Again Peter paced the room before coming to pause by Douglas' pillow.

"You both heard what I said this morning about the lack of a church in Lost Chief. That's what you children need for a pattern. Disagree with his creed as you might, the right kind of a preacher in here could answer your questions as they should be answered. If the church doesn't form ideals for young people like you, loose women and loose men will."

"That might be true, Peter," said Douglas; "but I don't see why you should expect us to believe the stuff you can't believe yourself."

Peter winced, then said gruffly, "I don't know as I do. All I know is that when I was a boy I went to church on Sunday morning with my mother and that there was an

old vicar who would have set me straight on the things you are talking about, if I'd have let him."

"Couldn't you believe what he said?" asked Douglas.

"I never went to him. I preferred my own rotten ideas. I—" He drew himself up with a sudden expression of disgust. "Faugh! How like a fool I'm talking!" He stalked out, this time closing the door of the room behind him.

"I wonder who Peter really is?" said Judith in a low voice.

Douglas shook his head. "Dad says he's seen better days. He sure has suffered a lot over something or other."

"I wish I knew all about life that he does!" exclaimed Judith.

"I don't wish either of us did," said Douglas. Then he put out his hand to touch Judith's knee with infinite tenderness. "Couldn't you manage to fall in love with me, Jude dear? I'd stay your lover all my life."

Judith put her hand over Douglas' and her fine eyes were all that was womanly and soft as she answered, "O my dear, you don't know what you are talking about. What you promise is impossible."

"But how do you know, Judith? I am an unchanging sort of a chap. You realize that, don't you?"

Judith shook her head. "You don't know what you are promising. You can't force love to stay, once it has begun to fade."

"Try me, Judith! Try me, dear!"

Judith looked at him, lips parted, eyes sad. "Douglas, I'm afraid!' she whispered.

And again the sense of loneliness flooded Doug's heart. There was a look of remoteness in Judith's expression,

a look of honest fear that had no response for the fine assured emotion that had held him captive for so many years.

The two were still staring at each other when Peter returned.

Doug's wound healed quickly and with no complications. He remained with Peter for a week or so, then returned to his home. Scott Parsons began preparations at once for carrying out Doug's sentence and for a time the post-office and the west trail to Inez' place saw him most infrequently. The excitement over the shooting having abated, Lost Chief began preparations for the great event of the year, the Fourth of July rodeo.

All the world knows the story of a rodeo, knows the beauty and the daring of both riders and horses, knows the picturesque patois of the sand corral. But all the world does not know of Judith's performance at this particular rodeo.

Mary, lax and helpless enough on most matters concerning her daughter's conduct, held out on one point. Judith could not enter the Fourth of July rodeo until she was at least sixteen. But now, at sixteen, Judith asked permission of no one. She entered the exhibition with Buster and Sioux and Whoop-la, the bronco Scott had given her.

The rodeo was held on the plains to the east of the post-office. The Browns owned the great corral, strongly fenced, and with a smooth sandy floor bordered by a grandstand weathered and unpainted but still sturdy enough to withstand the swaying and stamping of the crowd. Neither the Browns nor any other of the Lost Chief families made money out of the exhibition. It was a community affair in which was felt an intense pride. All Lost Chief attended, of course, and people

came in automobiles and in sheep wagons and in the saddle from the ranches for a radius of a hundred miles.

Burning heat and cloudless heavens, the high west wind and the nameless exhilaration and urge of the Rockies at seven thousand feet, this was the day of the rodeo. The exhibition began at ten in the morning and lasted all day, with an hour at noon for dinner.

There was the usual roping and throwing of steers and the usual riding of bucking broncos by men and women young and old. Douglas rode and rode well, but he had his peer in Jimmy Day and in Charleton. Judith rapidly eliminated all the women contestants and then began to vie with the men in the riding of buckers. By four o'clock as one of the four best riders, bar none, she was ready to enter the last competition on the program. This was listed as an original exhibition to be given by each of the four best riders. Douglas, Jimmy, and Charleton were the other contestants. Judith entered first.

She trotted into the sand corral on Buster, leading the blindfolded Sioux and followed at a short distance by Peter Knight, who was master of ceremonies for the day. A little murmur went through the grandstand. Judith's curls were bundled up under a sombrero. She wore a man's silk shirt with a soft collar. It was of the color of the sky. Her khaki divided skirt came just below the knee, meeting a pair of high-heeled riding-boots. Her gauntleted gloves were deep fringed. She rode slowly, silhouetted against the distant yellow of the plains. Sioux, a russet red, silken flanks gleaming in the sun, moved his head uneasily, but followed like a dog on leash.

Having crossed to the north end of the corral, Judith waited for Peter to come up on Yankee. Douglas, circling outside the fence uneasily, heard him say:

"You are a plumb fool, Judith. Anybody that plays round on foot with a bull isn't a cowman. It's a life and death matter with a brute like Sioux, and you know it."

"You slip his blindfold off when I dismount," she said, and she trotted back to the south end of the enclosure. Here she dismounted, slipped the reins over Buster's head and turned to face the bull. Peter jerked the blindfold from the bull's eyes. The great creature lifted his head and Peter backed away. Judith spread her arms wide and whistled. Sioux snorted, pawed the ground, and started on a thundering gallop toward his mistress.

There was a startled murmur from the grandstand. Buster snorted and turned. Without moving, Judith gave a shrill whistle. Buster wheeled and came back to his first position, where he stood trembling. On came Sioux, his hoofs rocking the echoes, and with every apparent intention of goring his mistress. But ten feet from Judith he pulled up with a jerk and with stiffened fore legs slid to her side, and rubbed his great head against her shoulder. Judith threw her arm about his neck and hugged him, white teeth flashed at the grandstand, which rose to its feet and shouted.

Judith raised her hand for quiet, then leaped to Buster's saddle without touching the stirrups. She put the uneasy horse to a slow trot and gave a peculiar soft whistle to Sioux. Obediently he fell in behind the horse, and Judith gave her audience a unique exhibition of "follow your leader." Buster trotted, galloped, and backed. Sioux imitated him without protest, until Judith brought up before the grandstand with both animals kneeling on their fore legs, noses to the sand. Then Sioux jumped excitedly to his feet as again applause broke out. Judith took his lead rope now and led him

to the middle of the corral where she blindfolded him and backed to Peter. Peter strode across the corral carrying a saddle.

"Once more, Judith," he said, "I ask you not to do this."

"Saddle him quick, Peter. Then get on Buster and ride him off when I'm up."

Peter adjusted the saddle as best he could to the bull's great girth while Judith rubbed the brute's forehead, talking to him softly. Sioux stood with head lowered, his red nostrils dilating and contracting rapidly. But he did not move. When Peter nodded, Judith jerked the blindfold free and leaped into the saddle. Sioux brought his mighty fore legs together and leaped into the air. Peter hesitated a fraction of a minute before putting his foot into Buster's stirrup, and the bull's leap brought him against the flank of the uneasy horse. Buster reared and Peter fell, his left foot in the stirrup. The horse started at a gallop, dragging Peter toward the east gate.

Sioux, glimpsing from his wild, bloodshot eyes the prostrated figure of a man, gave a great bellow and charged. Judith brought her quirt down on the bull's flanks, at the same time whistling shrilly. But Sioux was now out on his own. He overtook Buster halfway down the corral and thrust a wicked horn at the wildly kicking Peter. Judith leaped from the saddle and, running before Sioux, seized his horns and threw herself across his face. The bull paused.

At this moment came the full blast of Sister's hunting cry from the west gate. She crossed the corral like a hunted coyote and buried her fangs in Sioux's shoulder just as Douglas on the Moose caught Buster's bridle. Sioux cast Judith off as if she were a rag and gave his

full attention to Sister. Judith picked herself up, rushed to the still plunging Buster and jerked Peter's foot from the stirrup. She ran to the blindfold lying in the sand a short distance away, then whistling shrilly above Sioux's bellowing and Sister's yelping, she again caught one of the bull's horns in her slender brown hand. Sioux had rubbed Sister free against the fence and was now charging the dog as she snarled just under his dewlap.

Again and yet again he flung Judith against his shoulders, but she did not fall nor lose her grip. Suddenly, so quickly that the grandstand could not follow the motion, she had wrapped the blindfold over the burning eyes. As the bull stopped confused and trembling she hobbled his fore-legs to his head with the bridle-chain. Then she seized Sister's collar and stood panting, her hair tumbled about her neck. The grandstand shouted its delight.

Peter had risen and was wiping the sand from his face.

"Call Sister, Peter!" cried Judith. "She'll bite me in a minute."

Peter mounted Yankee, whistled to Sister, and with a rueful grin and shake of his head for the audience, he trotted from the corral. Judith loosened the bridle-chain and jumped once more into Sioux's saddle.

"Pull off his blindfold, Doug!" she cried.

"Nothing doing," returned Douglas succinctly. "You get off that bull, Jude, before I take you off."

"I'm going to ride him up to the grandstand," said Judith between set teeth.

She whistled to Sioux and he lunged forward. Doug twisted his lariat. It coiled round one of the bull's hind legs. Doug brought his horse to its haunches.

"You get off that bull, Judith," he said. "You've

put up the real show of the day. Be satisfied before you are killed. Sioux is almost crazy."

Frank Day, who was one of the judges, now trotted up. "Doug is right, Jude."

"There's not a bit of danger," cried Jude, "if you men would do what you're told to do! Peter had to stop and look instead of hurrying as I told him."

Her eyes were full of tears. She dismounted slowly and after freeing Sioux from Doug's lariat, she led the uneasy bull before the grandstand and made her bow. Jimmy Day brought her a horse and, mounting, she trotted out of the corral followed by the now half-crazed Sioux.

The three men contestants laughingly refused to put on their exhibitions. There was no hope, they agreed, of competing successfully against Sioux and Judith; so Judith received the prize, a twenty-dollar gold piece.

The day ended with this award. It was some time before Douglas and Judith freed themselves from the crowd. John and Mary, still laughing over Peter's discomfiture, led the postmaster off that Mary might treat his really badly skinned face at the ranch. The ranchers who had come from distant valleys began to scatter toward the Pass. When at last Judith and Douglas, with their string of horses and the still unchastened Sioux, started up the trail toward the post-office, they were held up by a stranger in a smart, high-powered automobile.

"Listen, Miss Spencer," he called, "how about your riding in the rodeo at Mountain City, this fall?"

Doug and Judith both gasped. The rodeo at Mountain City was the ultimate and almost hopeless dream of every young rider.

"How do you know they'd let me in?" asked Judith.

"I'm chairman of the program committee this year,"

answered the stranger. "If you are interested, I'll write you details when I get back home. I've got to run for it now."

"Interested!" exclaimed Judith. "I guess you know just what it means to be competing in the Mountain City rodeo!"

The stranger nodded. "Then you'll hear from me." He turned his panting car away from the plunging horses and was a receding dot up the trail to the Pass before Judith and Douglas found their tongues.

"Well, you deserve it, Judith," cried Douglas. "You beat anything I've seen. It's not only what you do but the way you do it. You've got to have a good outfit. I'll help you buy it."

"Do you really think I'm good enough for Mountain City?" exclaimed Judith.

"Good enough for the world!" declared Douglas.

Judith laughed and gave her attention to the unhappy Sioux.

Peter was at supper with John and Mary when they reached home. His whole face was covered with boric powder. Judith and Douglas shouted with laughter. Peter buttered another biscuit.

"I never was vain of my looks," he said plaintively. "It was mean of you, Judith, to ruin what I had."

"I was never so surprised in my life, honestly, as when you fell, Peter," cried Judith.

"O yes; you were more surprised an hour ago," contradicted Douglas. He turned to his father. "Judith's been asked to ride at the Mountain City rodeo. The chairman of their program committee stopped us and asked her."

"Bully for the girl!" cried John. "I'm not surprised, myself. Some show, Jude!"

"The Mountain City rodeo is a tough proposition for a young girl to tackle," said Peter.

"O, I'll go with her," John spoke quickly, "and let Mary and Doug run the place for a week. We'll be back in time for the round-up."

"If Judith goes, I go," said Mary with unwonted firmness.

"What do you think I am?" demanded John. "A millionaire or a Mormon?"

Douglas, a little white around the lips, glanced at Judith, who was calmly devouring the lavish piece of steak which she had served herself. Peter was rolling a cigarette.

"If Jude goes," John went on, "she goes with her Dad. And believe me, I am going to buy her the doggondest best outfit I can glom my hands on."

Peter caught Douglas' eye and almost imperceptibly shook his head.

"I'm going too," repeated Mary.

"You are not!" John's voice thickened. "You and Douglas run the place. If there's a rancher in the State deserves a vacation more than I do, I wish you'd name him."

"Give me a match, John," said Peter; "and if there's no objection, let's get out of this hot kitchen."

John tossed a match-box to the postmaster and led the way out to the corral. Peter and Douglas lined up on the fence beside him. Judith remained in the kitchen with her mother.

"Well, it was the best rodeo we ever had," said Peter.

"Jude was the whole show." John's handsome face showed vividly for a moment as he lighted his pipe. "I suppose there are other folks that ride as well, but she does it with an air!"

"It's her love of it gets across to people who are watching her," mused Peter. "And she rides with a sort of ease that belongs to Jude and no one else, to say nothing of her power over animals. There is a lot to Jude. Too bad she lives in Lost Chief. She hasn't a chance in the world."

"Just how do you mean that?" demanded John.

"Exactly as I said it. She hasn't a chance in the world."

"Chance in the world for what?" John's voice was irritated. "Talk so a fool like me can understand you, Peter."

"I guess you understand me, John. Hello, Judith! I should think you'd be tired enough to go to bed."

"Who? Me?" Judith perched beside Peter. "I should say not! I'd like to go to a dance."

"I sure-gawd will try to give you your fill of dancing for once in Mountain City." The anger had disappeared from John's voice.

"Judith's not going unless her mother goes!" said Douglas coolly.

Judith sniffed. "Her master's voice, again! You'd better horn out of this, Douglas."

"I haven't any intention of keeping out," retorted Douglas.

"You'd better," warned Judith. "If you think I'm going to turn down a chance for a real outfit, without hearing the argument, you're mistaken."

"I told you I'd help you," insisted Douglas.

"You! What could you buy!" jibed the girl.

"I was thinking, Jude," said John, "why don't you let me get you one of those regular riding suits like Eastern women wear, pants and one of those long coats."

"Everybody would laugh at me." Judith's voice was doubtful but deeply interested. "What do you think, Peter?"

"Women's clothes are out of my line," replied Peter.

"Aw, don't bribe her, Dad," protested Douglas.

"Bribe her!" snorted John. "For what?"

Peter gave a sardonic laugh that would have done credit to Charleton. "I'm going home, John, before I get hauled in on a family row. Doug, I'm pretty stiff. Will you help me saddle Yankee?"

Douglas rose reluctantly and followed Peter into the shed where Yankee was munching hay.

"Keep your fool mouth shut, Doug," whispered the postmaster. "You've got from now to September first to sidetrack this thing."

"If Jude passes her word to him, she'll go. And you know as well as I do, Peter, that most anybody would sell their soul to ride in that rodeo with a fine outfit."

"Certainly, I know it. But you keep out of it for a while."

"Peter, I can't! When Dad gets to working on Judith, I see red. Listen! Just listen!"

Stillness and starlight and John's voice rich and sweet as Peter never had heard it.

"You're beautiful, Judith! A beautiful woman! Let me dress you as you ought to be dressed, give you the right kind of a horse, and the whole of the rodeo will be yours. I tell you, girl, all you've got to do is to ask me for what you want."

"Do other folks call me beautiful, Dad?" Judith's voice was breathless.

"Why do you call me Dad? I'm not your father, thank God!"

Douglas strode out of the shed and up to the fence, followed by Peter on Yankee.

"I don't want to quarrel with you, Dad—" he began, furiously.

"Then don't start something you can't see the finish of," interrupted Judith. "Let me run my own affairs, Doug."

"That's sound advice." John's voice was cool. "I don't want to quarrel with you either. But I'm still master of my own ranch and, by God, I'll knock you down if you interfere in this."

Peter leaned over and put his hand on Douglas' shoulder.

"Don't be a fool, Doug! Go off and think before you talk."

For a moment there was silence. Douglas stood tense under Peter's kindly hand, his face turned toward the beautiful shadow of Falkner's Peak. The heavens, deep purple and glorious with stars, were very near. Suddenly Douglas turned on his heel and clanked into the house, where he threw himself down on his bed.

The old, futile bitterness was on him again, and he was quite as bitter at Judith as at his father. Of what could the girl be thinking? What did girls think about men like John, or any other men for that matter? If only there were some woman to whom he might go for advice. Grandma Brown? No; he had talked to her once and she had failed him. Charleton's wife had failed with her own daughter. There remained Inez Rodman, who knew Judith better than any one else knew her. Inez! Doug's mind dwelt long on this name. But he felt sure that the woman of the Yellow Canyon had forgotten what she had thought and felt at sixteen. And, after all, he did not want again to see life through

Inez' eyes. Long after the rest of the family slept, Douglas pursued his weary and futile self-examination, coming to a blind wall at the end.

The next day John mentioned casually that he and Judith had settled on taking the trip to Mountain City together. Douglas made no comment. Not that he had any intention of allowing Judith to make the trip under such circumstances, but he knew that for the present he could only bide his time.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRIP TO MOUNTAIN CITY

"Don't think. Just whistle. And always keep your poncho on the back of the saddle for when it rains."
—*Jimmy Day.*

LOST CHIEF was very proud of Judith's invitation and deeply interested in her preparations for the contest. Every day, now, she put Sioux and Whoop-la through their paces. Late in the afternoon when she was working the animals in the corral, it seldom happened that one of Lost Chief's riders was not perched on the buck fence, watching her and criticizing her and always assuring her, with the cowman's pessimism toward the outer world, that she had no chance of winning a prize.

Douglas watched the preparations with deep interest, but said nothing further against the trip. He usually joined the audience on the buck fence and smoked as he watched the really wonderful work in the corral.

One brilliant afternoon Grandma Brown and old Johnny rode up. Jimmy Day already was perched on the fence.

"Well," called Grandma, "I hear you've finally reached the goal of your ambition, Judith."

Judith, leaving Sioux for the moment, strolled over toward the old lady. "Who told you that, Grandma?"

"Well, ain't you?"

"I don't know what my goal is, but it sure isn't this."

"I'm glad you haven't lost your head entirely," said the old lady. "Jimmy, I wish you'd ask Little Marion to come over and help me out for a day or so. Lulu is coming home for a little visit."

"I'll ask her," said Jimmy. "But she won't come. She isn't so well. You'd better stop by and see her."

Old Johnny suddenly laughed. "He depones like you was a doctor that went out to make visits, Sister."

The old lady grunted as she gave Jimmy a keen look. "What's her mother say about her?"

"Why, you know Mrs. Falkner isn't back from Mountain City yet. She left before Charleton went out after wild horses," replied Jimmy.

"How should I know? I've hardly been off the ranch this summer. I guess I will stop by."

Old Johnny cleared his throat. "I was thinking I'd ask John if he'd let me go along up with him and Judith when they went to Mountain City. I got quite a gregus sum of money saved up and I never did see Frontier Day yet."

"That's right, Johnny! You ask him," said Douglas, with a remote twinkle in his eye.

"Johnny, you are a fool, I swear!" exclaimed Grandma. "Let me catch you lally-gagging off to Mountain City! Come on, let's get started."

"Anyhow, Doug is my friend," said the old man, belligerently, as he followed his sister.

"If I go, I'll take you along, Johnny!" exclaimed Douglas. "See if I don't!"

"You sure are crazy, Doug!" laughed Jimmy.

"I like the old boy," insisted Douglas. "He and I had better go up and see Jude rake in the prizes."

"Right now every prize has been doled out to the regulars," cried Jimmy. "But you should care, Jude!

You'll have the grandstand with you, every minute, if the judges aren't."

"It will be the big event of my life whether I win or not," said Judith. "What's the matter with Little Marion, Jimmy? I don't even remember her at the rodeo."

"O, she's busy, you see. I never did know a busier girl than Marion. I'm busy too, with Charleton gone so long. And that fourth-class postmaster of ours sent a lot of unclaimed magazines and mail order catalogs up to the house. We've been reading those. Say, I bet I know everything that's for sale in the United States. I'm the most price-listed rider in the Rockies."

"I'll be getting down to see Marion to-night or to-morrow," said Judith.

"O, you needn't bother," returned Jimmy. "It's a long trip, and she'll be all right."

"So you and Little Marion have been baching it!" mused Douglas. "Hang Charleton, he promised to take me out after wild horses!"

"He generally goes by himself." Jimmy mounted his horse. "He's a lone hunter, Charleton."

"When are you folks going to be married?" asked Douglas.

Jimmy turned his roan homeward. "I don't know," he answered soberly.

"I wish I could have gone with Charleton," remarked Douglas, watching Judith as she rubbed Sioux's head.

"Charleton! I should think you'd hate a long trip with that old coyote. I hate him."

"It isn't to be with Charleton I want to go. I want to get me some wild horses. But there was a time when I sure was crazy about being with him. I thought he

knew more about how a fellow could get happiness out of life than any one."

"Nobody in the Valley knows as much as Inez."

"Do you call her happy?"

"No; she's really sad. That's why she knows what real happiness is."

"Judith, how do you suppose Inez will end?"

"Over in the cemetery with a coyote-proof grave like the rest of us. And I ask you, Doug, since that's the end of it, why worry?"

"That's the very reason I worry! Life is so short and if we don't find happiness here, we are clean out of luck, forever."

Judith spurred the nervous Whoop-la into five minutes of active bucking, then she leaped from the saddle and came to perch on the fence beside Douglas. Her gaze wandered from his wistful face to the eternal crimson and orange clouds rolling across Fire Mesa.

"Outside of my riding," she said slowly, "I get most happiness out of my eyes."

Douglas followed her gaze. "Inez likes it too."

Judith nodded. "She got me to using my eyes years ago. She's a funny person. Reads almost nothing but poetry. She's got one she always quotes when she and I are looking at Fire Mesa."

"What is it?" asked Doug.

"I don't know but one verse:

"A fire mist and a planet,
A crystal and a cell,
A jelly-fish and a saurian,
And caves where the cave-men dwell,
Then a sense of law and beauty
And a face turned from the clod,
Some call it Evolution
And others call it God."

"Say it again, slow!" ordered Douglas, his eyes still on Fire Mesa.

Judith obeyed.

"I didn't know Inez had got religious," he said, when Judith finished.

"She hasn't. She doesn't believe anything except that beauty is right and ugliness is wrong."

"Then she'd better clean up her door-yard!" exclaimed Douglas.

"O darn it!" sighed Judith. "I can't even discuss poetry with you without your heaving a brick."

"I'm not heaving bricks. O Judith, I'm so devilishly unhappy!"

"You ought to quit thinking so much and have something you are crazy about doing. When I get blue, I put Whoop-la to bucking."

"I'm crazy about something, all right. Judith, don't you think you're ever going to care about me."

"I don't know, Doug. Who does know, at sixteen?"

"I did."

"I wouldn't marry a man that expected me to be a ranch wife in Lost Chief, if I loved him black in the face." Judith jumped down from the fence and turned Whoop-la free for the night.

Douglas sat staring at her, wondering whether or not to mention the subject of the trip to Mountain City. He was firmly resolved that unless Judith gave in to her mother on the matter, he was going with her and his father. But finally he decided that he would not end their friendly conversation with a row and he clambered down and went about his chores.

And so the days passed and the time grew close for the departure to Mountain City. One evening, two days before the start, Douglas and Judith went to call on

Little Marion and Jimmy. When they reached the ranch house, they found Little Marion in the big bed in the living-room and Jimmy sitting beside the unshaded lamp, reading to her.

"Well!" exclaimed Douglas. "What's happened to you, Marion?"

Marion put back her great braid of hair, but what answer she might have made they were not to know, for at that moment Charleton returned from his wild horse hunt. Dust-covered and sunburned he strode into the room with a pleasant grin.

"Hello, folks! Why, Marion, are you sick?"

"Kind of. What luck, Dad?"

"Fair. Brought in a good stallion and some weedy stuff. How's the ranch, Jimmy?"

He asked this with his eyes still on his daughter.

"O.K., Charleton," replied Jimmy.

"You made a long trip, Charleton," said Douglas.

"Left the day after the rodeo," tossing his hat and gloves on the floor and sitting down on the edge of the bed. "I remember Little Marion was laid up then with a sprained ankle or something. What do you hear from your mother, Marion?"

"She's well and so's the baby. They'll be home anytime now."

"What's the matter with you, Marion?"

"O, I'm sort of used up."

"How do you mean used up? I don't like your looks. I'm not a fool, you know."

Marion burst into tears. "You know what it is!"

Charleton made a sudden spring at Jimmy; but Douglas caught him by the arm.

"Hold on, Charleton!" cried Doug. "If things have gone wrong, you're as much to blame as any one."

"You clear out of here, Doug!" shouted Charleton.

"Don't you go, Doug and Judith!" sobbed Marion. "I need some one to stand by me."

"I'm standing by you, Marion," said Jimmy, who had not stirred from his chair. "I'd just as soon you'd beat me up, Charleton. A little sooner. But that isn't going to help matters."

Charleton stood glaring at his prospective son-in-law.

"Come off, Charleton!" cried Douglas disgustedly. "You are a fine one to raise trouble over a situation like this. Strikes me you've done everything you could do to bring it about."

Charleton did not seem to hear. His face was cold and hard. "Marion, you and Jimmy pack up and get out of here!"

"I can't, Dad! I'm too sick!" sobbed the girl.

"Sick or no sick, you get out of here!"

"Don't you do it, Marion!" cried Judith. "No man's got a right to act so at a time like this. I'll stick by you. Jimmy, you go get Grandma Brown. I'll bet she can fix Charleton."

Jimmy rushed out of the house.

"Now, Doug," Judith went on, walking over to take Marion's hand, "you and Charleton go on out while I have a talk with Marion."

"This happens to be my house," said Charleton. "Marion, get up and get out!"

"I can't!" repeated the girl.

"You are a fine guy to tell a fellow how to live on wine, women and horses," exclaimed Douglas, "and then raise the devil when your chickens come home to roost. We all know Little Marion was born a month before you were married."

Charleton gave Douglas an ugly look. "I'll settle with

you, for that, young fellow!" He stepped toward the bed. "Are you going to get out, Marion?"

"No, she isn't!" snapped Douglas. He made a sudden rush at Charleton and pushed him into the kitchen, Judith slammed and locked the door behind them.

It was on this scene that John Spencer appeared, closing the outer door innocently behind him.

"I wanted to borrow your buckboard for a couple of weeks," he began. Then he paused and looked inquiringly from his son to his old friend.

"Marion's in trouble," said Douglas, "and Charleton is trying to drive her out. Jude and I won't let him."

"Why should you butt in?" demanded John.

"Anybody with a decent heart would," replied Douglas.

"Get your kids out of here, John!" roared Charleton. "Judith's in there with the door locked!"

"Judith!" called John. ""Come here!"

"I can't, Dad. I promised Marion to stick by her."

"You come out or I'll break the door down and bring you!"

"If you do, I'll not go to Mountain City with you!"

John hesitated, though his face was purple.

"You couldn't keep her away from the rodeo and you know it," sneered Charleton. "Fetch her out, John, unless you're afraid of Doug."

"Jude, are you coming?" shouted John.

"No, sir."

John heaved against the flimsy door and it broke on its hinges. He rushed into the inner room. Judith, her great eyes blazing, stood with one hand on Marion's shoulder.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Dad! You put a finger on me or Marion if you dare!"

"Don't touch her, Dad!" Douglas' voice had the old note of warning in it.

But John, furious that his children should be defying him in public, was quite beyond any effort at self control. He rushed on toward the bed.

"You blank-blank!" screamed Judith. "You aren't fit to touch Little Marion's feet! You or Charleton either!"

John seized Judith's arm. Quick as a lynx-cat, Douglas leaped across the room, seized his father from behind and was dragging him toward the door when Grandma Brown ran in.

"Now," she cried sternly, "what does this mean? Every one of you get out of here as fast as your feet will carry you!"

John stood up, sheepishly, Douglas eying him belligerently.

"Look here, Grandma," Charleton shook his finger in the old lady's face, "I want you to understand that—"

"Understand!" shrilled Grandma. "Understand! You have the face to try to say anything to me, Charleton Falkner? Do you think any man in this valley can have anything to tell me I want to hear, least of all you, Charleton Falkner? I know your history, man! And yours too, John Spencer. And you can either get out or listen while I tell these children a few facts about you."

Charleton put a cigarette between his teeth, handed one to John, lighted his own, gave a light to John and, John at his heels, walked out into the night.

"You and Douglas go home, Judith," said Grandma briskly. "Jimmy, I want a talk with Little Marion. You put that door back on the hinges, then disappear."

So Judith and Douglas rode away. It was a heavenly

night, with more than a hint of frost in the air, and the horses were as frolicsome as Prince.

"Now, will you tell me," asked Judith as she brought Buster back into the trail for the third time, "just why Charleton acted so?"

"It's just like I told you once," replied Douglas. "A man wants his own women to be straight no matter how much he does to make 'em crooked."

"Men are yellow," said Judith succinctly. "What's the use of Charleton—" She paused as if words failed her, and they rode their prancing horses in silence till John galloped up and pushed Beauty between them.

"I hope you two fools feel better!" he shouted. "You've got a row going with Charleton."

"Lot I care!" chuckled Judith. "I'll sic Grandma Brown on him again if he bothers me."

"I'd rather have a wolverine after me than Charleton," John went on excitedly. "You both ought to be licked!"

"Try it," suggested both the young people together.

"I've a notion not to take you up to Mountain City and I wouldn't if—"

Judith interrupted him. "You're not going to take me. I'm going with Doug."

"O, no, you're not!" snarled John.

"And I'm not going to quarrel with you," Judith went on. "I'm sick of men. I don't like the way you acted to me to-night. I told you if you broke that door down I wouldn't go with you, and I always keep my word. I'm not going to take money from Douglas, either. I'll borrow from Inez. And I don't want to hear another word from you about it."

She put the spurs to Buster and was gone into the starlight. The men spurred after her, but she reached the home corral before they did. And John could storm

only at the deeply perturbed Mary, for Doug and Judith went to bed, pulled the covers over their heads and were heard no more that night.

The next morning, before breakfast, half of Lost Chief had called the Spencers on the telephone to tell them that Little Marion had a daughter. The dominant note in the reports was one of huge laughter. Judith was serene, and so was John. But the serenity was not to last. When she went out to the corral to look after Sioux she came back stormily.

"Where's Sioux and Whoop-la?" she demanded of John, who was mending a spur strap.

"Put away!"

"Have you killed them?"

"No. I'll produce them as soon as you agree to keep your promise to go to Mountain City with me."

"I never promised. I intended to go with you, but I never promised."

"Remember if we don't get started by to-morrow," roared John, "we can't get there in time."

"I said I wouldn't go with you after last night, and now, I wouldn't go with you if you were the last man on earth."

She rushed from the house, and Douglas followed her.

"I'll help you hunt for them, Judith," he said.

She turned to him, white to the lips. "We're not going to hunt for them. There are other Mountain City rodeos coming. If he thinks I'm going to make a joke of myself rushing round the neighborhood after my outfit, he's mistaken! I'm not a child. Don't bother me, Douglas; I'm going to Inez."

She put Buster to a gallop and was off, the dust following her in a golden, whirling spiral. Douglas went into the house and stood before his father, face flushed,

golden hair rumpled, soft shirt clinging to his big gaunt chest.

"Dad, that's a rotten deal to put over Judith."

John rose slowly to his full height and the two men looked levelly into each other's eyes. John's expression was curiously concentrated. He tapped Douglas on the arm.

"Doug, you keep out of this, or I'll forget you are my son. You're smart and you've got a bossy way with you. But I'm still master here. There never was a Spencer that didn't rule his own family. Now, understand me. Keep out of this matter between me and Jude. I'm going to break that highty-tighty filly; and by God, she knows it!"

"You'll never break her while I'm alive," said Douglas, and he walked out of the house.

Mary, coming from the cow shed with a pail of milk, looked at him anxiously. "Let it go, Doug," she said in a low voice. "It's hard on Judith, but she's been very headstrong and she's point-blank disobeyed me in the matter. She deserves what she's got. Let it go."

Douglas looked at Mary's care-worn face, so appealingly like, yet so unlike Judith's. Suddenly his tense muscles relaxed. "I guess you are right. I'd better be thankful it is as it is. But it sure is a rotten trick of Dad's."

Mary shrugged her shoulders and went on into the house. Douglas went off to bring up horses for the fall round-up. A number of people rode up during the morning to see the start for Mountain City. They found the ranch deserted, except for Mary, who pleaded a sick headache and refused to talk. Inez had no such reticence, however, and at the post-office that night Judith's troubles ran neck and neck in popular interest with Little

Marion's. Both situations were of a nature to appeal to Lost Chief's sense of humor. Douglas appeared during the session and learned that Charleton's wife had come home.

"I hope she won't go crazy too," he said.

"No danger!" Peter tossed a letter to Frank Day. "Charleton'll be in line by to-morrow. Too bad some one can't hobble John too."

"Plumb unnecessary, the whole affair," grunted the sheriff. "I suppose the next thing on the program will be a big wedding."

"I guess they'll manage it like the Browns did," volunteered Young Jeff, squirting his quid accurately to the center of the hearth. "Be around borrowing my car in two or three weeks, run up to Mountain City for to be married, then give a big party upstairs here, and nobody the worse off for anything."

Everybody nodded and grinned. Douglas sat on a pile of mail order catalogs smoking, his hat on the back of his head, his eyes thoughtful. "Anybody know how Jimmy's been behaving to-day?"

Frank Day laughed heartily. "I rode up there this morning after I heard the news, friendly like, of course. Grandma had Jimmy out in the yard, washing baby dresses, while she stood in the door giving him what for. Jimmy was dribbling cigarette ashes over the suds but he sure was game. He grinned and got red when he saw me. 'I'm the hen-peckedest damn fool in the Rockies,' he says."

There was a roar of laughter.

"What was Charleton doing?" asked Young Jeff, wiping his eyes.

"I found him in the corral. He'd slept in the alfalfa

stack and he wasn't quoting poetry. I didn't stay with him but a minute."

Again there was laughter.

"Big Marion will calm him," said Peter.

"I know one thing," exclaimed Douglas. "None of us will be saying the things to Charleton we've been saying behind his back."

"We sure won't," agreed Frank. "I suppose Judith's all broke up, poor little devil!"

Douglas nodded.

"I saw her and Inez hobnobbing in the Rodmans' corral to-day," said Young Jeff. "She'd better cut Inez out."

Douglas stared at the familiar faces around the room as if he never before had seen them. Peter, thin, melancholy, his long sinewy throat exposed by his buttonless blue shirt; Frank Day, big and keen of eye, squatting as usual against the wall; Young Jeff, ruddy and heavy-set, with his kind blue eyes and heavy jaw. All clean shaven, all in chaps and spurs, all good fellows, and all as helpless before the nameless mystery of life as Doug himself. The sweat started to his forehead. He rose, pulling on his gloves.

"It's early yet, Doug," said Peter.

"I'm going to call for Judith," replied Douglas. He went out into the night, whistled to Prince, mounted the Moose and galloped across to the west trail.

It was sharp and frosty but Inez and Judith, in mackinaws, were sitting on the back steps with a little fire of chips at their feet. Douglas dismounted and came into the fireglow. The light caught the point of his chin, his clean-cut nostrils, and the heavy overhang of his brows.

"Ready to come home, Jude, old girl?" he asked.

"Sit down and talk to us a little, Douglas," suggested Inez.

Douglas hauled up a broken wagon seat and sat down. Prince crawled up beside him and went to sleep with his head and one paw on Doug's knee.

"I suppose congress was sitting at the post-office, to-night?" said Judith.

"Yes. Everybody's strong for you and Little Marion."

"I don't see why I should be bunched with her. Not that I care though!" Judith tossed her head and then dropped her chin to the palm of her hand.

"I swear some one ought to give John Spencer a good thrashing!" exclaimed Inez.

"Don't worry!" Judith spoke through set teeth. "I'll be even with him some day."

"I just as soon try to lick him," said Doug. "But what good would it do?"

The three sat in silence for a moment; then Douglas asked suddenly, "Inez, do you believe that poetry about the Fire Mist that you taught Judith?"

"No; but I think it's a beautiful poem, just the same."

"Say it all for me, will you, Inez?"

Inez, in her soft contralto, repeated the lines.

"And you don't believe it?" Douglas' voice was wistful. "Don't you wish you did?"

"I don't know as I do," replied Inez.

"But don't you see," urged Douglas, "that without believing it, there's no meaning to anything?"

"Well, what of it?" asked Inez.

"I'm the kind of a guy that has to see a purpose to things, I guess," replied Douglas, heavily. "Peter is dead right. Lost Chief is a rotten hole."

"It's a rotten place for women and a paradise for men," stated Judith flatly.

"Never was any place in the world more beautiful," mused Inez. "If you'd just see the beauty all around you, Doug, you'd do without the religion."

"I do see the beauty," replied Douglas. "I've been seeing it ever since you told me to look for it. But it just makes me blue."

"You're no cowman, Douglas," Inez spoke thoughtfully. "You ought to go East to college and get into politics or something!"

Douglas shook his head. "I'm like Charleton. I couldn't leave these hills and plains for anything the East has to offer me." He rose slowly, and Inez stared up at him. Tall, slender, straight, his young face a little strained, a little wistful, he was to the older woman something finer than Lost Chief knew.

"Judith," she said suddenly, "you're an awful fool!"

Judith grunted, immersed in her own troubles.

"Come, old lady," said Douglas. "We must get home.

"I'm going to stay all night with Inez."

"No, you're not, Jude," said Douglas quietly, and he stood waiting.

"Let her stay, Doug. She'll be all right," urged Inez.

"No," replied the young rider, with the familiar straightening of his chin. "Come, Judith!"

The tall girl rose, shrugged her shoulders, and followed slowly to the corral after Douglas. Inez did not move and shortly they trotted away, leaving her alone in the firelight.

The next day, sullenly enough, John ordered Doug to make the horses ready for the round-up. Frost had set in and he suddenly announced himself as fearful lest snows catch the herds high on the mountains. So Douglas and Judith spent the day bringing in several stout horses from the range. On the morning following, be-

fore breakfast was finished, Scott Parsons hallooed from the corral. The family went to the door.

Scott was leading Sioux and Whoop-la.

"Found these in the old Government corral up on Lost Chief Mountain," he said laconically.

"I suppose you're going to get something worth while from Dad for this!" cried Judith passionately.

Scott looked at the girl curiously. "You sure are crazy, Jude! Do you suppose I'd help John Spencer do you like that? John's a blank-blank and he knows it."

Douglas moved to stand by Ginger's head.

"No man says that to me without a grin." John drew his gun.

"Jude!" said Doug sharply. He reached up and seized Scott's hand and with a sudden twist relieved him of his six-shooter.

Judith struck up her father's arm and a shot scattered dust from the sod roof of the cabin. John smacked Judith on the cheek. She threw herself on him like a fighting she-bear. John dropped his gun to seize her wrists and Mary promptly picked the weapon up and gave it to Douglas.

"Now," said Doug, when Judith stood panting like a young Diana, her eyes black with anger and excitement, "if you two men want to fight, take your fists and go to it!"

John suddenly grinned, his eyes on Judith. "I don't see anybody spoiling for a fist fight but Judith. You little lynx-cat! You get handsomer every day!"

"I'd hate to let a woman make putty of me like that," sneered Scott. "Let me have my shooting-iron, Doug."

Douglas had broken the revolver and unloaded it. He gave it back, receiving the lead ropes of the two animals in return, and Scott trotted away.

"I'm much obliged to you, Scott!" shrieked Judith. "I'll ride up and tell you all about it, some day."

Scott waved his hand but did not look back. John, still holding Judith's wrists, suddenly drew her to him and kissed her full on the lips. Then, with a laugh, he freed her and returned to his breakfast. Douglas swore under his breath and turned the uneasy Sioux and Whoop-la into the corral. The day went forward as if nothing had happened.

That night, Charleton and John appeared at the post-office gathering for the first time since the birth of Little Marion's baby. Only Peter had the intrepidity to comment on recent events.

"I didn't want Judith to go alone with you to Mountain City, John," he said. "But, all the same, that was a rotten deal you gave her."

"She's a disobedient little hussy," John's voice was truculent, "and it was the only way I could get at her."

"You mean the fight she put up to help Little Marion?" demanded Peter.

"O, dry up, Peter!" exclaimed Charleton. "Me, I'm sick of the sound of a woman's name. They're all alike, ungrateful minxes."

"Ungrateful is the word," agreed Peter grimly. "But I'd like to know just what Marion was under obligation to you for?"

Charleton did not reply.

"When are they going to be married?" asked Peter, after a moment.

"First of the month. We'll give 'em a party up here in the hall that Lost Chief will never forget. John, do you ride to-morrow?"

"Yes, Charleton. Everybody's reported but you."

"I'll be there. Start from your place, as usual?"

John nodded, and the rest of the evening was given over to a discussion of details of the round-up.

The fall round-up was always a long and arduous affair. The cattle were scattered all through the ranges covered by the Forest Reserve. Slowly and with infinite labor and skill, they were sought out and herded down into Hidden Gorge Canyon, below Fire Mesa. Thence, they were driven to the plains east of the post-office, where the riders cut out their own cattle.

The weather held for two weeks, star-brilliant at night, with the low of mother-cows separated from their calves from mountain to mountain, with the crisp wind bringing down the frosted leaves of the aspens, and at noon the hot dust swirling up from the horses' hoofs into the sweating faces of the riders.

Perhaps thirty men rode in the Lost Chief crowd. The work was more or less solitary by day, but at night over the camp-fires, there was society enough. Douglas enjoyed it all to the very tips of his being. He was coming now into the great strength that belonged to his height and could do his full share of the heavy work. He had thought that, rolled in his blankets, under the stars, he would find inspiration that would help him solve the problem of life. But long before the camp-fire was low, he would drop into slumber that ended only when his father shook him at dawn.

When the round-up reached the plains, the women set up a camp kitchen and served hot meals. The weather this year held clear to the last day, when a blizzard swept down from Dead Line Peak and the last of the cutting out was finished in blinding snow. Douglas and John, after putting the last of their yearlings into the cut over fields, staggered into the warm ranch kitchen half-perished with the cold.

CHAPTER X

WILD HORSES

"If I could believe in God and a heaven I'd ask nothing more of life except a good saddle-horse."

—*Charleton's Wife.*

AND so another long winter was upon Lost Chief. It was much like other winters for Douglas except for the fact that he began systematically to trap for pelts. It was a heavy winter and game was plentiful, with pelts of exceptionally fine quality for which there was a good market in St. Louis. Douglas worked hard and began the accumulation of a sum of money which he planned to use eventually to start his own ranch on the old Douglas section, which was to be his when he came of age.

But although to the young rider the money earned seemed the main aspect of the winter's work, the important result really lay in the deepening it gave to his appreciation of the beauty and mystery of this mountain valley.

Lost Chief was lovely in the summer with its crystal glory of color on hill and plain. But Lost Chief in winter was awe-inspiring in its naked splendor. Dead Line Peak and Falkner's Peak, barren save for the great blue snows and for the black shadows that crept up and down their tremendous flanks, were separated from each other by a long, narrow, slowly rising valley. Down this valley rushed a tiny brook whose murmur the bitterest weather could not quite still. Along this brook grew

quivering aspens, and beside it coyotes kept open a little trail. Along this trail, Doug set his traps, as well as up on the wall of the mountains where lynx-cats and wolverine were hid.

Each day at noon, mounted on the Moose, with Prince at heel, he rode the circuit of the traps, seldom reaching home until long after supper was cleared away. There were days when, on leaving the ranch for the long, bitter-cold ride, it seemed to Douglas that he never could come back again, that the pain of living in the same house with Judith in her girlish indifference was to be endured no longer. The primitive intimacy in which the family dwelt made every hour at home a sort of torture to him, a torture that he did not wish to forego yet that he scarcely could endure. One cannot say how much of Douglas' self-control was due to innate refinement, how much to expediency, how much to the male power of inhibition when fighting to win the love of a woman.

But, whatever the cause, Douglas was developing a power of self-control possessed by no other man in the valley. It made him, even at eighteen, a little grim, a little lonely, a little abstracted. And he rode his traps like a man in a dream. He thought much, but not constantly, of Judith; though she perfumed all his thoughts. For the most part he pondered on the blank mystery of life and on the enigma of love, which to him seemed far more productive of pain than of joy. Little by little, he found himself eager to get into the hills. Quite consciously he left the ranch each day with the thought that when he reached the crest of old Falkner's lower shoulder, where his lynx trap was set, and beheld the unspeakable strength and purity of the far-flung ranges, to whose vastness the Lost Chief peaks were but foothills, he would find a wordless peace.

And thus the winter slipped away and blue-birds dipped again in the spring beyond the corral. And again alfalfa perfumed the alkaline dust that followed the birds into the Reserve; and then again, frost laid waste the struggling gardens of high altitudes; and for another winter Doug followed traps, varying the monotony by getting out pine-logs for his ranch house.

The winter that Judith was twenty and Douglas twenty-two was one of the most severe ever known in Lost Chief country. It was preceded by a summer of drought and the alfalfa and wild hay fields failed. Feed could not be bought. Steers and horses died by the score. Doug did little trapping. He and his father spent the bitter storm-swept days fighting to save their stock. By March they were cutting young aspens and hauling them to the famished herds to nibble. Coyotes moved brazenly by day across the home fields, stealing refuse from the very door-yards. Eagles perched on fence-posts near the chicken runs. Jack-rabbits in herds of many score milled about the wind-swept barrens, gnawing the grass already cattle-cropped to the roots. The cold and snow persisted till mid-April, and even then Lost Chief was only beginning to thaw on its lower northern edge.

It was a winter of tremendous nerve strain. There had been little opportunity for the neighbors to get together, and the battle with the cold never ceased. John Spencer, always at his best when great physical demands were being made upon him, came through the winter better than Douglas, whose profound restlessness was beginning to tell even on his youthful strength. It was almost as much of a relief to Doug's family as to Doug to have Charleton Falkner insist, late in April, that Doug go on a wild horse hunt with him.

It was like the opening of a prison door to the young

rider. He had dwelt within himself too much, had seen too much of Judith, had been too deeply perplexed by his own relation to life. He resolved that during the week they were to be out on the hunt, he would not once permit himself a serious thought.

They left Charleton's ranch early one morning, driving a sheep wagon which trailed four saddle horses. On the tail-board of the wagon were a bale of alfalfa and several bags of oats, for which Charleton had scraped Lost Chief to the bottom of its bins.

The snow was running off the trail in roaring streams. There was brilliant sun. Magpies dipped across the blue. Charleton drove while Douglas lay across the bunk, his spurred boots resting on an embroidered sofa cushion which he had purloined from Mary for lack of a pillow. He lay thus all day, except at meal time, neither man caring to talk. All day long, they pushed north, over the hills, each hill and valley lower than the last. When they made their night camp, the snows were gone. The next day, too, they pursued ever-dropping trails, that disappeared toward noon, leaving Charleton to find his way through barren hills that were criss-crossed only by antelope and coyote tracks. At mid-afternoon, from the crest of one of these hills they beheld a winding, black river with a flush of green along its borders. They covered the miles to this at a trot and made their camp beside the rushing waters. The eager horses almost rended harness and halter in their desire to taste the budding grass around the sage-brush roots.

They carried food and fodder only for a week, so they dared allow but two days for the actual hunting. At dawn they had finished breakfast and were riding up into the rolling hills to the west. Brown hills against a pale blue morning sky, then a sudden flood of crimson

against a high horizon line. Against this crimson, a row of grazing horses!

"We'll separate now," said Charleton. "Do like we always do. Pick out one horse and ride him down. They will be awful soft after such a winter. Don't get side-tracked from one horse to another. They'd kill the Moose off at that. He's getting pretty old for this kind of thing. I'll see you at camp to-night."

Douglas dropped into a valley which twisted under the hill where the wild horses were grazing. Here he dismounted and, leading his horse, began to snake his way upward through the sage-brush which covered the hillside. When he was within a hundred yards of the herd, he paused. There were fifteen horses, of every kind and color. Douglas selected a jet black mare with a wonderful tail and mane. Then he turned to mount. Charleton, at this moment, appeared on the far side of the hill. The Moose nickered, and the herd tossed heads and broke.

The mare dropped over the east side of the hill as if she had been shot. Douglas turned the Moose after her and they hurled down the steep slope with thundering hoofs. For some moments, the Moose sought to turn hither and yon as different horses flashed across his vision. But Doug held him to the black mare, and once the Moose realized that she alone was their quarry Douglas was able to give almost all his attention to watching her strategy.

She did not show fight nor did she double on her tracks. Fleet as a bird, she flew over the hills, dropping into canyons, leaping draws, jumping rock heaps, until little by little she drew ahead of the Moose until she became no larger than a black coyote against the yellow hills. But Douglas would not allow the Moose to break

from his swift trot. As long as he could keep the mare in sight he was content.

The sun was sailing high and the Moose was winded when the mare, cantering painfully along the ridge of a hill, stumbled and fell. She was up again at once but her gait slowed, perceptibly. In less than a half-hour Doug was within roping distance of her. As the lariat sung above her head, she half turned, gave Doug a look of anguished surprise, leaped sideways and disappeared up a crevice in a canyon wall. Douglas spurred the Moose in after her. They were in a little valley, thick grown with dwarf willow. The mare was not to be seen.

Now began a search that persisted till the Moose's sturdy legs were trembling. Douglas threaded the valley again and again. There was no exit save through the one crevice by which they had entered. He had all but concluded that the mare had been swallowed up by the earth when he found her trail, turning up the south wall. He spurred the Moose upward, and there in a clump of cedars he found her hiding. With a laugh he again twirled his rope and it slipped over the tossing black head. As the Moose turned and the rope tightened, the mare gave a scream that was like that of a human being in dire agony. For a moment she dragged back, then, head drooping, trembling in every muscle, she followed in.

Dusk was falling when Douglas made the camp. Charleton already had started a fire in the little cook-stove. He came out and examined the mare as well as the failing light and her extreme timidity permitted.

"She's a beauty, Doug. Don't believe she's over four years old. Any brand on her?"

"No. From the looks of her hoofs, I'd say she'd been

born with the herd. What luck did you have, Charleton?"

"None at all. I took after a young stallion and he wore my horse out. I know where he's bedding down to-night and I'll get him to-morrow or shoot him."

"You'll get him," said Douglas.

Charleton chuckled. "Nice thing if the mare is all we bring in. Make some coffee, Doug. The biscuits are baking. I could eat one of Sister's coyotes to-night." Charleton jammed another sage-brush knot into the little stove.

They were off at dawn. Douglas rode this day a young bay horse he had recently broken and named Pard. But though Pard was strong and willing, he lacked the skill of the Moose in running this rough country, and by noon Douglas was obliged to give up the pursuit of a dapple gray he had selected. He was far out on the plains when he made the decision to turn campward. To the distant south, in the Lost Chief ranges, a snowstorm was raging; but Pard and Douglas were dripping with sweat, under a sweltering sun. Strange, thimble-shaped green hills, dotted the plains about them. Douglas drew up at the base of one of these to rest his horse. Scarcely had he done so when a tiny herd of antelope trotted casually round the neighboring hillock. They halted, sniffed, and turned, but not before Douglas had drawn his saddle gun and fired at the leader. The creature went lame at once but disappeared with his fellows among the green hills.

Douglas followed and shortly found a spot of blood that was repeated at irregular intervals for a mile or so. Pard was grunting now, but Douglas rowelled him and pushed on until he saw the antelope kneeling in the lee of an outcropping of rock. It struggled to its feet

and fell again, its beautiful head dropping against its crimsoned breast.

"Wonder if I can get you home alive to Judith?" said Douglas.

After a moment of thought, he loosened his lariat, swung and roped the antelope around the horns, dragging it from its futile sanctuary. Then he dismounted and removed the lariat. The antelope bleated but lay trembling, making no attempt to rise. Douglas examined the shattered shoulder.

"You poor devil!" he said. "Even if you weren't hurt so badly, you'd die of fright before I could get you home. Well, of course I'm sorry venison is out of season, but a man must eat!" He put his gun to the delicate head, and an hour later Pard was snorting under a gunny-sack of venison. Douglas lighted a cigarette and, whistling gaily, started once more for camp.

But this, if not a day of what Lost Chief would call real adventure, was at least to be a day of episode. About mid-afternoon Doug heard the tinkle of a sheep-bell. He was not surprised, for he knew that he was well within sheep country. He followed the tinkle and came shortly to a wide draw where moved a mighty gray mass of sheep. The herder, on a bay horse, responded to Doug's halloo with a wave of his hand. Douglas made his way round the edge of the draw and waited for the herder, who rode slowly up to meet him. Then he stared at the stranger's gray-bearded face with the utmost surprise.

"Mr. Fowler!" he cried. "What are you doing out here?"

The older man, in shabby blue overalls and jumper, a black slouch hat pulled over his eyes, smiled grimly.

"You have the advantage of me, young man. I don't remember your face."

"I'm glad you don't!" replied Douglas. "But I've always wanted to tell you I sure-gawd was ashamed of myself. I was the kid that made you trouble at Lost Chief seven or eight years ago."

Fowler's black brows met as he studied the young rider's frank face.

"So you are!" he said slowly. "So you are! Well, I'll never have that kind of trouble again. Have you eaten? I'm late about dinner. Fact is, I get careless about my meals, living alone!"

"No, I've been out after wild horses and don't plan to eat till I get back to camp ten miles yonder on the creek."

"Better break bread with me," suggested the preacher.

"That's sure white of you. I don't mind if I do." Douglas returned Mr. Fowler's grim look with one of wistful curiosity.

The preacher silently led the way to the sheep-herder's wagon which perched on the peak of a hill above the draw. "I don't have much to offer you but beans," he said as they dismounted.

Douglas looked from the blood-stained gunny-sack to the clergyman's deep-set eyes, hesitated, then said, "Beans are good and the sheep-man's staple." He followed into the wagon and sat on the edge of the bunk while Fowler prepared the frugal meal.

"Do you mind telling me," asked Doug, "why you are herding sheep instead of folks?"

"I couldn't earn a decent living herding folks. My wife died. I took anything that offered that would take me away from men and their accursed ways. There was something about sheep-herding that made me think of Jesus Christ and the country round about Bethlehem. I have found a kind of peace here."

Douglas cleared his throat. "How long have you been at it?"

"A couple of years."

"How was it you couldn't earn a living, preaching?"

"It's an age of unfaith," replied the preacher.

"I don't believe it's an age of unfaith." Douglas puffed slowly on a cigarette. "That is, not like you mean. That Sunday, if you'd given us something we could have set our teeth in, we'd have listened to you. I remember distinctly, I sat down in the back of the room, saying to myself, 'Now if this old-timer has something interesting to say, I won't let the kids in.' But *you*—excuse me, Mr. Fowler—you just got up and bleated like a Montana sheep-man."

The preacher set the coffee-pot on the stove, straightened himself, and shouted, "I spoke the word of God!"

"I don't know whether there's a God or not. Probably there isn't any. But if there is, I'll bet He never talked foolish threats that a fellow has hard work to understand." Mr. Fowler gasped. "Now wait a moment," protested Douglas. "Don't get mad and throw me out like I did you! I'm a man now, and I tell you, Mr. Fowler, I'm troubled about many things and I want you to let me talk to you."

The beautiful, sympathetic light of the shepherd of souls shone in the clergyman's eyes. "Talk on, my boy! I too am troubled about many things. But not about God. I know Him."

"How do you know Him?"

"By His works, the sun, the stars, the universe, through His holy word, the Bible."

Douglas waved his hands irritably. "Words! Just words! How can they mean anything to a hard-headed man like me? Everything came out of a fire mist.

How do you know it was a mind made that fire mist? Why couldn't it have been a—a— Christ, what could it have been?" Douglas paused with lips agape with horror as he gazed on the evil of the universe.

Fowler motioned the young rider to a seat at the table. "God bless our food and give us understanding," he said. Then he served Doug and sat staring thoughtfully at his own coffee-cup. "Were you ever in love?" he finally asked Douglas.

"Yes."

"Did she love you?"

"Not that I can find out!"

"Does she know that you love her?" pursued the minister.

"Yes, I told her so."

"But," said Mr. Fowler, "love isn't something you can put your teeth in. How can she believe you?"

"Because, I'm something she can put her teeth in! Believe me, Mr. Fowler, if God once convinced me He was real, I'd believe anything He told me. Just give me facts. That's all I want."

"The universe is a fact."

"Yes, but the universe being a fact doesn't prove there's any hereafter. Hang it, Mr. Fowler, can't you preachers get it through your heads that what people want you to prove to them is that there is a hereafter? That's all there is to your job. Prove that and you can lead us round by the nose. But if you can't show us that the soul doesn't die, there is no meaning in anything, and we might as well be like we are in Lost Chief."

"What's the matter with Lost Chief?" Mr. Fowler's smile was grim.

"Peter Knight says it's that we have no ethics. Inez

Rodman says it's that we don't know beauty when we see it."

"Inez Rodman? O, that woman of the Yellow Canyon! If there were a minister in Lost Chief, she wouldn't be in the Valley."

"O, I don't know! Religion doesn't seem to affect her kind, anywhere. But Peter says we'd ought to have built a church along with the schoolhouse. I don't see myself how the kind of Bible stuff you teach could help a hard living, hard thinking kind of people like us."

"Did you ever read the Bible, Douglas?" asked the preacher.

"I've tried to. If you ask me to read it like it was only more or less true history, I could get away with it. But when you tell me it's the actual word of God and show me a picture of God in long white whiskers and a white robe, why you can't get away with it, that's all. I know that nothing like that ever produced Fire Mesa or Lost Chief Range or—or Judith."

Mr. Fowler groaned. "Douglas, you are blasphemous!"

"I'm not. I'm just unhappy. I think I was meant to be a religious guy. I'm of New England stock and they all depended a lot on religion. But I just can't swallow it."

"And you never will as long as you take the point of view you do. You must wipe your mind clear of all you have read and thought, for God says that unless we become as little children, we cannot believe. Religion is not a matter of knowledge and reason. Religion is a matter of hope and faith."

Douglas sat turning this over in his mind, his yellow hair rumpled, his clear eyes, with the sun wrinkles in the

corners, fixed on the far snowy gleam of Lost Chief Range.

"Hope and faith," he repeated softly.

There was a shout from without. "O, you Doug!" and Charleton rode up at a gallop. He stopped before the open door. "I've been trailing you for two hours. I got three horses penned up in a draw and I need your help. Hello, Fowler! What the devil are you doing out here?"

"Come in and have a bite of grub, Falkner," exclaimed the preacher.

"Don't care if I do!" Charleton threw a weary leg across the saddle and dismounted. Douglas, who had finished his meal, returned to the bunk and Charleton took his place.

"Kind of funny to find you and Doug eating together," said Charleton.

"He should have given me a swift kick," agreed Douglas. "Instead, he fed me."

"That's sound religion, isn't it?" asked Mr. Fowler, pouring Charleton a cup of coffee.

"It's sound hospitality, anyhow," replied Charleton.

"Aw, any one would admit Fowler lives up to his faith," expostulated Douglas.

Charleton glanced at the young rider in surprise. "What's happened to you, old trapper?"

"Nothing. Only I wish I had the same religion he's got."

"So's you could herd the sheep?" asked Charleton.

"So's I could have peace," retorted Douglas.

"Peace? What does a kid like you want of peace? Anybody that can't find peace in Lost Chief is a fool."

"I'm no fool!" contradicted Doug, with a growing irritation at Charleton for interrupting his talk with

Fowler. "And where is there a peaceful person in Lost Chief?"

"Douglas," said Charleton, "when you are as old as I am you'll realize that Lost Chief is as near heaven as man can hope to get. A poke of salt and a gun on your saddle, a blanket tied behind, a good horse under you, the Persian poet in your pocket, all time and the ranges before you, and what more could mortal man desire?"

"A woman, you've always said before," grunted Douglas.

"I was holding back out of respect to the sky pilot," laughed Charleton. "But since you mentioned it, there's Inez, who's always ready for a trip."

Mr. Fowler shot a quick look at Douglas, who again grunted indifferently and rolled a cigarette.

"Are you and Douglas partners, Falkner?" asked the preacher.

"Once in a while. Why are you herding sheep, Fowler? This herd yours?"

"No. They belong to a Denver man. I'm herding because I couldn't keep a church together."

Charleton nodded. "The day of the church is over."

There was silence during which Charleton devoured beans, Douglas smoked, and the preacher sat with his eyes on the slow moving herd.

Finally Charleton said, "And why do you think something is the matter with Lost Chief, Douglas?"

"In other parts of the country," replied Douglas, his blue eyes fixed unwaveringly on Charleton's dark face, "among people of our kind and breed, a girl like Judith couldn't run with a girl like Inez and be considered decent. And a couple like Jimmy and Little Marion couldn't have a party a week after they were married,

the baby attending, and be considered O. K. by the so-called best folks and nothing more said."

Charleton's face grew darkly red. "Who told you that?" he asked in an ugly voice.

"I'm not a fool, as I've told you before. And as you very well know, I've wanted Judith for my wife ever since I was a boy and I haven't wanted her man-handled. And you know, as Jude said once, a girl has about as much chance of staying straight in Lost Chief as a cottontail has with a coyote pack. She's good because, well, because she's Judith, that's all. Now, I tell you when things are as hard as that for a young girl in a beautiful place like our valley, there's something wrong. And look at Little Marion!"

"Leave her out or you'll regret it," snarled Charleton.

"I'm not afraid of you, Charleton," said Douglas, with indifference not at all assumed. "Little Marion is a peach of a girl. She should have been a big influence. She's—she's had a wrong start."

"She's got a fine baby and a good husband."

"I never could argue with you, Charleton. But I know Lost Chief is a bad place for girls. Why, I'll bet there isn't a finer bunch of girls than ours in the world, for looks and nerve and smartness. Peter says he's never seen any that could touch them. And take the stories you read. Where's a heroine like Judith?"

There was something so simple and so earnest in Doug's manner and voice that the red died out of Charleton's face and he said, "I'm with you on that point, Douglas."

"Peter told me once," Douglas went on, "that the Greek race was the finest in the world in their minds and their looks and in every way, until the Greek women got promiscuous. That as soon as that happened the race

began to decay. And he said that there isn't a nation in the world any stronger than the virtue of its women."

"How old are you, Douglas?" asked Mr. Fowler.

"Twenty-three. I just want to say this one thing more, then I'm through. When things like that happen to Jimmy and Little Marion, they aren't doing the right thing by Lost Chief, and"—rising with sudden restless fire—"I'd like to see Lost Chief be the kind of place my grandfather Douglas wanted it to be!"

Charleton yawned. "We'd better be moving along."

"Don't go for a minute," pleaded Mr. Fowler. "Douglas was right when he said that the whole world is hungry for a belief in immortality. And as long as the world exists it will have that hunger. And religion is God's answer to that hunger. Civilization without religion is the body without a soul. Religion brings a spiritual peace that man perpetually craves and that riches or women or horses or the hunt never brought and never can bring. At heart, there's not an unhappier man than you, Falkner. Why? Because you have no belief in immortality."

"Great God, Fowler, how can I believe in it when I can't?" shouted Charleton.

"Exactly! How can you?" returned Fowler, deliberately. "No foul-minded man ever yet had an ear for the word of the living God."

Charleton jumped to his feet. "What do you mean, you bastard cleric, you!"

"Aw, come off, Charleton!" exclaimed Douglas. "I've learned more dirt from you than I bet Judith ever has from Inez. Come on, let's go get the horses. Thanks for the grub, Mr. Fowler."

"You are very welcome. Don't go away angry with

me, Falkner. If I called you foul-minded, you called me by a foul name."

"I guess we're even," agreed Charleton. "I'm obliged to you for the meal." He swung out of the wagon, mounted his horse and was off, Douglas following.

Charleton had hobbled his capture of horses in a little draw, several miles from the sheep camp. In the excitement and hard work of herding the creatures into the camp and re-hobbling them, there was no opportunity to discuss the visit with the preacher sheep-herder. Nor did Douglas wish to bring the matter up when, long after dark, they sat down to their supper of venison and biscuits. He kept Charleton firmly to the story of his capture of each horse and when this was done and the dishes washed, he went to bed.

But long after Charleton had crawled in beside him, Doug lay awake thinking of Judith and of the preacher. He wondered what influence a man like Fowler would have on a girl like Judith. He wondered if Judith would come out with him to call on the preacher. He thought it highly improbable. And then he thought of Peter and what Peter might have said that day had he and not Charleton interrupted Doug and the preacher. For the thousandth time, he thought of Peter's love for his mother and he wondered how his mother had kept herself fine as Peter said she had. Perhaps she had had some sort of religious faith.

"I wish Grandfather Douglas had put the church up with the schoolhouse," he said to himself. "Maybe it would have saved Judith as well as Scott Parsons."

Then he gasped. An idea of overwhelming importance had come to him. He lay for an instant contemplating it, then he crept from the bunk and the sheep wagon into the open. It was a frosty, star-lit night.

The river rushed like black oil, silver cakes of ice grinding above the roar of the current. The Moose was munching on a wisp of alfalfa. Douglas saddled him and led him softly out of hearing of the wagon, then sprang upon his back and put him to the canter.

Two hours later, Douglas was banging on the door frame of Fowler's sheep wagon.

"It's just me, Douglas Spencer," he replied to the preacher's startled query. "I had to come over to ask you something."

A light flashed through the canvas. Then the door opened. "Come in! Come in! Light the fire while I pull my boots on. This is like the days when I was saving souls and marrying couples."

Douglas quickly had a fire blazing and pulled the coffee-pot forward. He pushed his hat back on his head and the candle-light threw into sharp relief the firm set of his lips. His six-shooter banged on the bench as he sat down and put one spurred boot on the hearth. The preacher perched blinking on the edge of the bunk. Through the canvas came the endless restless movement of myriad sheep.

"Mr. Fowler," said Douglas, "I own some land that came to me from my mother when I was twenty-one. If I build you a little church on it, will you come to Lost Chief and live there and preach? I'll be responsible for your wages."

Fowler's face was inscrutable. "Why do you want me to come, Douglas?'

For the first time, Doug's voice thickened. "I want you to help Lost Chief and to save Judith."

"Tell me about Judith."

Douglas hesitated, then he asked, "Catholics have a thing they call the confessional, haven't they? Well,

it's a good idea if the chap they confess to is the right kind. I don't believe a word of your religion and yet I have a feeling that you are the right kind. Judith! She's twenty-one now. I'm six foot one. She's about two inches shorter. Weighs, I guess, fifty pounds lighter. Finest gray eyes you ever saw. Red cheeks. Her mouth used to be too big, but now it's perfect. Rides and breaks a horse better than any man in the Valley, bar none. Loves animals and can tame and train anything. A great reader."

Douglas paused.

"She sounds very attractive. What's the trouble?" asked the preacher.

Douglas twisted his hands together. "You know who Inez Rodman is. Well, she is Jude's best friend! And she has formed all of Judith's ideas about love and marriage."

"Yet you say Judith is straight?"

"She sure-gawd is! But how can it last? She's restless and discontented and Inez is brilliant, feeds Judith's mind."

"Has her mother any influence over her?"

"None at all."

"How about her father?" asked the preacher.

"Of course, he's only her foster-father. She likes him and she hates him. He certainly couldn't help her."

"And you are sure there is no hope in Judith's mother?"

"O she's just broken, like a patient fool horse. Good as gold, you know, but with about as much influence over Jude as a kitten. Judith hasn't any one to tie to, not any one. Peter is all right but he jaws too much. She hasn't any one."

"Doesn't she care for you?"

"She says she's fond of me. Fond of me! I'd rather she hated me. I'd as soon have a dish of cold mush from a woman like Jude, as fondness."

"And do you think I could influence Judith?"

"I don't know. But I want you to try. And it isn't all Judith with me. I love Lost Chief. I never want to live anywhere else. And I'd like to see it the kind of a place my grandfather Douglas wanted it to be. No, it honestly isn't all for Judith, though she's the beginning and the end of it."

There was something almost affectionate in the preacher's deep-set eyes as he watched Douglas.

"Do you realize, my boy, what you are asking? When you bring a preacher into Lost Chief, you are going to rouse an antagonism against yourself that will astound you. These people are of New England stock. There is no more intelligent stock in America, nor stock that is more conceited, more narrow, more obstinate, nor more ruthless. And the farther a New Englander gets from religion, the more brutal his virtues become. If you take me into Lost Chief, you are going to start a depth of strife of which we cannot foresee the end."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Douglas. He rested his chin on his palm and eyed the glowing stove thoughtfully. "I guess you are right," finally; "nothing makes Lost Chief folks so mad as to have some one hint they aren't perfect." Then he chuckled. "It'll be a real man's fight. I wonder what Jude will say! Are you afraid, Mr. Fowler?"

"Afraid? Yes! I'm not as young as I was once and I am not over-anxious for such a struggle. But this thing isn't in my hands. If ever the Almighty showed Himself a directing force, He is showing it here. This is what He ordained from the day you drove me out

of the schoolhouse. Do you remember what I said to you?"

"You quoted the Bible, I think. I don't remember what it was."

"I said, 'Ye shall find no place to repent you, though ye seek for it with tears.' "

Douglas murmured the words over to himself. His face worked a little. "It's true! It's the living truth!" he exclaimed unevenly. "Not that I've got anything to repent—" he hesitated. "What is repentance? What is life? Where is God, if there is a God? What does it all mean, anyhow?"

The preacher said slowly, " 'There is a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will.' That's what it all means. When shall you be ready for me, Douglas?"

"I think the fall would be best. Suppose we say right after the round-up. I'll look for you on the twentieth of September."

"That will suit me. I can then give my boss ample notice."

"What pay will you want, Mr. Fowler?"

"Just enough to feed and clothe me. We'll arrange that after we get a church established."

Douglas rose with a broad grin. "I sure-gawd have let myself in for something now," he said. "But I'll take care of you, Mr. Fowler."

"All right, young Moses," returned the preacher, smiling into Doug's eager face. "Good-night."

Charleton was still sound asleep when Douglas at dawn lay down beside him and slipped into dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER XI

THE LOG CHAPEL

"Don't take any responsibility that you don't have to. That's my idea of a happy life."

—*Young Jeff.*

BY eight o'clock the next morning they had broken camp and had started homeward, with their kicking, squealing herd of wild horses. The little black mare alone led docilely. It was a difficult trip back to the valley and Douglas was grateful for this, for it kept Charleton from airing the cynical comments Douglas knew he was evolving in regard to the preacher. And Douglas was filled with a new purposefulness that was almost happiness. He did not want Charleton to obtrude himself upon this new-found content.

They reached Lost Chief late one afternoon and Douglas found himself and the trembling mare at home in time for supper. The family came out to the corral to examine the prize.

"She's got some mighty good points," said John; "but I doubt if you'll ever be able to do anything with her. She's wild. And she'll die of homesickness for the range. Once in a while you see 'em like that."

"She has an intelligent eye." Judith was going over the horse eagerly.

Douglas smiled a little. The range horse, with its slender, hard-muscled beauty, was no finer drawn than Judith circling carefully about the corral, the wind whipping her black hair across her thin, vivid face.

"I don't believe she'll eat with us all watching her," said Mary. "Let's go in to our own supper."

"She'll have to eat pretty soon or give up." Douglas followed Judith into the kitchen. "She hasn't eaten a pound since I caught her."

"Poor little thing!" exclaimed Judith.

At supper Douglas gave the details of the hunt, which were greeted by the family with considerable hilarity.

"One no-account horse to show for a week's hard work!" laughed John.

But Douglas was not perturbed.

"I don't mind," he said. "Wild horses was the least of what I went after and, as it turned out, the least of what I got. I met Mr. Fowler."

"The old preacher?" exclaimed Judith. "Where was he?"

"He starved out at preaching and is herding sheep down in the Green Thimble country. He fed Charleton and me and we had a long talk."

"You had nerve to eat with him after what you did to him!" John was grinning.

"I felt that way myself," agreed Douglas. "But he didn't hold a grudge against me. He's not that kind. And I think he was so lonely he'd have been glad to feed the Old Nick himself."

"Who is he herding for?" asked Mary.

"Some one in Denver. He's going to give it up in the fall."

"What for? Got a church?" John was still grinning.

Douglas nodded slowly. "Yes, he's got a church."

"Did he tell you where?" asked Mary.

"Yes; it's in Lost Chief," replied Douglas.

"Lost Chief!" roared John. "What are you giving us?"

"I'm giving it to you straight. I asked him if he would come if I'd build him a little church up on my part of the ranch and he said he would."

There was a stunned silence while the audience of three considered this reply. Judith eyed Doug intently, then said, "I bite! What is the joke, Douglas?"

"No joke. I asked him to come. I want to hear what he has to say."

"What did Charleton say about it?" asked Mary.

"Charleton doesn't know. I certainly wouldn't give him a chance to spoil the trip." Douglas tossed the thick yellow hair from his forehead and waited for his father's comment. He could not recall ever having carried on a more difficult conversation than this. There were beads of sweat on his upper lip. Old Fowler had warned him of the antagonism he would meet. And here it was. The air was black with it before a hundred words had been spoken.

John scratched his head. "You mean you actually asked that old fool to come here and preach in Lost Chief?"

Douglas nodded over a piece of pie. "Only," he added, "he's not a fool. Far from it. We may not agree with him, but he's a wise man. A very wise old man."

"And you are going to build a church for him?" John went on.

Again Douglas nodded.

"Are you plumb loco?" John's voice began to rise.

Douglas' color was deepening but he had himself well in hand. "Maybe I am loco. But it can't hurt any one to have Fowler here, can it?"

"I guess he won't stay long enough to do any actual harm!" Judith laughed.

"He's going to stay quite a spell," returned Doug. "I'm going to see that he does."

"But everybody will make fun of him and of you too," volunteered Mary.

"Probably," agreed Douglas. "But even at that I doubt if they have as much fun as I do. My sense of humor is my strong point!"

"Huh!" sniffed Judith. "You'll need more than what you have, Douglas, in this campaign."

"Look here, Doug," urged his father with an obvious effort to be patient, "just what is the joke?"

"Now listen, Dad! It's not a joke. I'm in deadly earnest. I haven't got a particle of religion in me but I'm interested in that line of talk to see if I can discover what other folks get out of it. Peter Knight is not a fool. He knows the world and he says Lost Chief needs a church. All right, it's going to have one."

"Peter Knight is some advocate, all right!" growled John. "He's always saying he had a religious up-bringing, and look at him! Fourth-class postmaster in a cow valley!"

"I don't suppose his religious up-bringing had a thing to do with that," said Douglas.

"Then what's the good of a religion?" John's voice was triumphant. Douglas said nothing and his father went on. "You'll be the laughing-stock of the Valley. You can let on you won't care, but I know you will."

"Yes, I'll care," admitted Douglas. "But that can't be helped. It seems to be a part of the game."

"Well, he can't come to this house!" roared John. "I wouldn't have one of that breed on the place. Mind you keep him off this ranch, Doug."

"I expected you to say that." Douglas' jaw was set. "That's why I plan to build him a cabin up on my section. Grandfather's old cabin isn't worth fixing up."

He did not look at Judith as he spoke. Had he done so he would have been puzzled by the wistfulness in her eyes.

"I sure wonder, Doug," said John irritably, "where you get your crazy notions!"

"He's exactly like his grandfather Douglas!" exclaimed Mary.

"His grandfather Douglas!" cried John. "Why, the old man would kick the stones off his grave if he knew what his grandson was up to. He used to boast that he came West just to get rid of the Presbyterians and the Allopaths. Nothing he hated like a sky pilot!"

Douglas rose and shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he said, "if I'm as popular with the rest of the Valley as I am with my family, I'm liable to have my head turned before this thing is over," and he went out to attend to his chores.

As he paused by the corral fence to watch the little wild horse standing motionless over the untasted hay, Judith joined him.

"Looks as if Dad might be right about her," he said.

"I'd like to try my hand at her, Douglas." Judith's voice was eager.

"You may have her, Jude. I was hoping to bring you in two or three, but Fate said otherwise."

"I'm much obliged to you, Douglas," said Judith soberly. "You are always mighty generous—" She hesitated for a moment. "I wish you weren't going in for this thing with the preacher, Doug."

"O well, let's drop the matter!" said Douglas wearily, and without a word further Judith turned away.

The next morning at breakfast, John was irritable and would not let the subject of Fowler's coming rest.

"What did Charleton say?" he asked.

"Charleton doesn't know," replied Douglas, patiently. "He wasn't there when I talked it over with the preacher."

"I'll bet he wasn't or you never would have gotten away with it," growled John.

"Sure! I'm a nervous man about Charleton," grinned Douglas. "Come now, Dad! Why should you be sore at the idea?"

"Lots of reasons! I hate a man who thinks he's enough superior to me to tell me how to behave. And I feel sore as a pup that my son should be bringing such a man into the Valley. All the folks will say you are criticizing them. I'm not going to let you do it, Douglas!"

Douglas gave a short laugh, which was echoed by Judith.

John grew red. "My father would have thrashed me when I was a grown man if I'd laughed at him like that!"

"O well, look at the man he was!" chuckled Judith.

"Don't you speak that way to me!" roared John. "The children of this generation certainly are a bad lot! But one thing you two will remember. I'm master of this house and as long as you stay here you'll obey me! And you just let me hear you telling anybody, Doug, of your crazy plan and you'll learn for the first time what I am!"

"Then you won't help me put up my buildings?" asked Douglas.

"Not for the use of any fool preacher!" shouted his father.

Douglas lighted a cigarette and went out. For the

first time a sense of disappointment marred the beauty of the plan he had perfected with the preacher. He realized now that he had counted on Judith's being interested even were she antagonistic. But she was indifferent. He would have preferred that she be resentful like his father. There was nothing tangible there to struggle against. One could neither fight nor urge indifference. Then he set his jaws. Judith should see! He knew whither he was going now. He had found the fine straight line of which Peter had spoken, long ago, and he would hew to it, at whatever cost. And Judith could not, must not fail him. If only he knew the things she really thought! His jaw was still set as he watched the little wild mare, now ceaselessly circling the corral fence, her face to the hills. Judith crossed to the bars and Douglas turned away.

There still was too much frost in the ground for spring work on the ranch and it would be a month before the cattle could be driven up into the Reserve. It was during this month that Douglas had planned to put up two cabins on his ranch, one for the church, the other for himself and Fowler to occupy. He had accumulated a sufficient number of logs to more than supply his needs and he had counted on his father's help in erecting the buildings. He wondered now if Peter would help him, and old Johnny Brown. That afternoon he rode down to the post-office.

Peter was breathlessly interested. "You'd better keep it quiet, Doug, till the old man gets here," he said. "If you get old Johnny up there, don't give him an inkling."

Douglas nodded. "Then I can count on you, Peter?"

The postmaster eyed the young rider keenly. John

Spencer had never been the man his son had grown to be!

"Do you mean count on me for the plan or the cabins?" asked Peter.

"Both!"

"Yes, you can, Douglas! I don't know whether the plan is a good one or not. But I'm delighted to see you taking a step like this. It's gratifying to me, Doug. It is indeed; and I know your mother would have been delighted." Peter's voice broke, and he said harshly, "Now, get along, Doug. I've got to sort the mail."

For the first time that day, Douglas' lips wore a little smile. He whistled to Prince, who had grown too lazy of late to propitiate Sister as he had in his younger days and who was keeping that growling old Amazon at her distance by snapping at her viciously. Prince lunged over to Pard's heels and Doug started off for his call on Johnny Brown.

"I deponed I'd come, didn't I?" asked old Johnny. "It's been a gregus long time and I'm only half-muscled as well as half-witted now. But I'll come. I'd help you build a cabin in hell if you wanted me to. Honest, I would, Doug."

Douglas did not laugh. "Thanks, Johnny! Then I'll look for you to-morrow."

"I deponed I'd come, didn't I?" repeated the old fellow, and he was still deponing when Douglas started homeward.

Peter inveigled Young Jeff into taking the post-office for a couple of weeks. Post-office keeping did not accord at all with the ideas of pleasant living of the native-born of Lost Chief. Undoubtedly if Peter had not offered his services year after year there would have been, a

great part of the time, no post-office in the Valley. But Peter had means of his own with which to piece out the salary and for some inscrutable reason he clung to the sort of prestige he enjoyed in the community as a Federal employee. His friends always protested violently at substituting for him, but always gave in, fearful lest Peter carry out his threat of giving up the job. So he appeared at Douglas' ranch, bright and early, bringing a graphic account of Young Jeff's despair over a pile of second-class mail.

Lost Chief Creek bordered one edge of Douglas' acres. Dead Line Peak pushed an abrupt shoulder into the stream at the northwest corner. Below this shoulder lay a grove of silvery aspens and of blue spruce, dripping with great bronze cones. Just above the flood line of the creek, Douglas trimmed out enough trees from the grove to give elbow-room for the cabins and corrals. By the end of Peter's two weeks, the heaviest part of the building had been done.

On the last day of the fortnight—it had been a very pleasant fortnight for Peter—he and Douglas dawdled long over their noon meal while old Johnny began the work he loved, the chinking of the log walls. Leaning against a log at the edge of the clearing, Lost Chief Valley sloped below them. A blue line of smoke rose from the Spencer chimney.

"Dad is sure sore at me this time," said Douglas. "He's hardly spoken to me for a week."

"About Fowler, I suppose."

"Yes. He feels that I am disgracing him. He's sure I'm going to turn religious. I can't make him believe that that is not why I'm bringing Fowler in."

"What is your real reason, Doug?" asked Peter, taking a huge bite of cold fried beef.

"I don't want to turn religious. I don't want to be anything that's queer or unreasonable. What I want is to get to believe—in a future life."

Peter laughed. "Isn't that religion?"

"I don't think so! You can believe in immortality without believing in miracles and that Eve was made out of a man's rib, and without being goody-goody."

Peter made no comment for a moment. He finished his beef and lighted his pipe before he said, "I have an idea that the kind of a mind that can believe in the soul's floating around in space can swallow the rib story without much choking. What I want to see in Lost Chief is the kind of ethics that Christ taught."

"Ethics! Ethics!" scoffed the younger man. "Who gives a hang about ethics if they aren't going to help us live again? You can bet I don't! Ethics may do for a cold-blooded guy like you, Peter. But me! I want something as big and as real and as warm-looking as Fire Mesa."

"Poor old Fowler!" groaned Peter.

Douglas glanced at the postmaster questioningly; then his eyes wandered back toward the ranch house. A tiny figure in blue leaped on a horse and was off at a gallop.

"Judith's going to Inez' place," said Douglas.

"She sees too much of Inez!" Peter scowled. "Her mind is getting exactly Inez' twist to it."

"There was a time when you told me Inez could give Judith good advice." Doug's voice was bitter.

"So she could. But I never said Inez and Jude should be buddies, did I?"

Douglas threw his cigarette into the creek and rolled over on his face with a groan. "I'm sick of worrying about it!" he said.

"Does she still talk about going the round of the rodeos with a string of buckers?"

"No. She says that was just kid stuff. She has an idea now she'll breed thoroughbred horses." Douglas turned over on his back and gazed up into the heavens, where an eagle hung, motionless.

"Lord! Breeding horses is no work for Jude!" cried Peter.

Douglas did not reply. Peter eyed the young man's clean, hawk-like profile and went on. "What does she say about you and Fowler?"

"She laughs at me."

"Do you think you can get her in touch with Fowler?"

Douglas sat up with a jerk. "Get her in touch with him? Say, what do you think I'm bringing that sky pilot in here for? You can bet she'll get in touch with him! I'll show that girl I haven't played all my cards yet!"

Peter stared long and unblinkingly at Douglas. "Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered and filled his pipe again.

The summer passed for Douglas with extraordinary rapidity. Profiting by the experience of the previous winter, every rancher put in as heavy a grain crop as he could handle and there was little leisure in the Valley during July and August. Lost Chief was, of course, immensely interested in Doug's building operations. He was accused of planning to be married and conjecture ran rife. When he began work in the interior of the log chapel, he hung burlap bags over the windows and locked the doors. But his precautions were futile. By the middle of June, every ranch in the valley was talking about Douglas Spencer's motion-picture hall and wondered why he was building it so far from the center

of the community. The truth came out in an entirely unexpected manner.

About a week before he expected the preacher, Douglas rode down in the evening for his mail. Peter had gone to Mountain City on a rare visit and Young Jeff was acting as postmaster again. Scott Parsons was helping him sort the mail and it was Scott who fell upon a battered suitcase, tied with frayed rope.

"What's this mess?" he exclaimed. "Let's see this tag." He shoved the suitcase close to the lamp. "'The Rev. Mr. James Fowler. Care of Douglas Spencer.'" Scott looked up with an oath. "What do you know about this!" he gasped.

Douglas, standing with his back to the cold stove, said nothing.

Young Jeff dropped the handful of letters he was distributing, and examined the tag for himself. "Old Fowler, eh? Thought he was dead long ago. What's he coming to see you for, Doug? Going to preach—" He paused and his eyes grew round. "Doug's motion-picture theater! The sky pilot! That cabin is a church!"

Scott gave a gasp, followed by a shout of laughter. "How about it, Doug?"

Douglas grinned.

"What are you doing, Douglas? Starting a ranch for broken-down sky pilots?" asked Young Jeff.

Still Douglas made no reply. He strode over to the table and put his hand on the suitcase.

"Hold on!" protested Scott. "Answer a few questions. What are you trying to put over on us, Douglas?"

"You'll know, pretty soon," answered Doug.

"Well, you always were loco but I never thought you'd

get real dangerous, till now!" exclaimed Young Jeff. "Listen, don't try to put that guy over on us, Doug!"

Scott stood eying Douglas with a mixture of curiosity and impatience in his hard eyes. He had just parted his lips to speak when the door opened and Charleton and Jimmy came in.

"Look at here, Charleton!" roared Young Jeff. "Look at the address on this bag!"

The two newcomers scrutinized the tag. "Well," said Jimmy, "I'll be everlastingly dehorned, vaccinated and branded!"

Charleton's mouth twisted. "So the old fool got you, Doug! You've got hard nerve, that's all I have to say!"

"Nerve! I'll say so!" cried Scott. "What's the great idea, Doug? Going to bring Lost Chief up to your level, huh?"

Douglas' cheeks were burning. He jerked the suitcase from the table and started for the door.

"Believe me, cowman," called Scott after him, "you and the sky pilot have laid out a course of trouble for yourselves."

Douglas paused with his hand on the latch. "You are a pack of coyotes!" he said and he slammed the door after himself.

And so the secret was out! Nothing that had occurred in the Valley for years had stirred the ranchers so deeply. There was much joking and derisive laughter but beneath this was a sense of resentment that grew day by day. Grandma Brown, Peter of course, and Frank Day were sympathetic to the idea. Some of the older women wondered if it might not be a good thing in giving the young fry a place to go on Sundays. But the young fry, with huge enjoyment not untinged with malice, planned to run the preacher out of the Valley in short order and to

mete out such treatment to Douglas as would prevent his making a like fool of himself again.

Douglas had set up housekeeping in the new cabin now, and on the night before he expected Mr. Fowler, Judith rode up to see his new home. Old Johnny had gone down to the post-office and Douglas finished his supper and was sitting on the doorstep when Judith galloped up, with the Wolf Cub under the heels of her mount.

"This is my first real ride on the little wild mare," she said, dropping from the saddle.

"Has she gotten over her homesickness, yet?" asked Douglas.

"I think so. At least, she follows me around about as close as Wolf Cub does."

"You are a wonder, Judith! I wish you thought as much of me as you do of your horses and dog."

"You wouldn't let me train you, Doug," said Judith plaintively.

Douglas laughed. "A whole lot you'd think of a man you could train!"

Judith laughed, too, sitting down on the step beside Douglas. For a moment she was silent, then she said softly: "How you must love it up here!"

"I do! But I'll be glad when old Johnny can be with me all the time. I don't like this bachelor stuff."

"You and Scott ought to join forces," Judith's voice was mischievous. "By the way, Scott's heard of a standard bred mare he can get me for five hundred dollars."

"I wouldn't trust Scott to pick a horse for me," grunted Douglas.

"And you'd be foolish if you did," agreed Judith. "But he'll play fair enough with me."

"He will if it's to his interest to do so. If he can make anything off you by being crooked, he'll be crooked. But I suppose there's no use in me warning you. Have you got the money for the mare?"

"Only half of it. All the stock I've been able to raise and sell in the last five years amounts to about two hundred and fifty-six dollars."

"I'll lend you the rest," offered Douglas.

"Dad said he'd let me have it, and so did Inez. But I'd rather borrow from you."

Douglas flushed with pleasure. "Had you, Judith? Tell me why!"

"I don't like to be under obligations to Dad; and Inez' money—well, I don't feel keen about her money. As for you—Doug, it's queer, but I'd just as soon ask you for anything. I don't know whether it's a compliment to you or not."

"I consider it a compliment," said Douglas softly. "I had no idea you had that sort of confidence in me."

"O, I'm not such a wild woman that I don't know a real man when I see one, Doug,—even if you are making an idiot of yourself just now! You should have planned to be more tactful about bringing your old sky pilot in here."

"Tactful! What a word!" exclaimed Douglas, "For heaven's sake, Jude, don't you get the idea better than that? This is a matter of—" He hesitated, at a loss for a moment for a word that should tell Judith something of the yearning conflict that obsessed him. "This is a battle," he said finally, "a fight to the finish for—for—" then he blurted out the word that in Lost Chief was taboo —"for souls!" exclaimed Douglas.

Judith looked at him quickly; but to Douglas' vast re-

lief she did not laugh. Instead, her eyes were deep with some emotion he could not name.

"I don't think I understand you, Doug," she said at last. "I couldn't get so worked up over anything that had to do with religion. But I do see that it means a lot to you and I think you're foolish to trust to a man like Fowler to put anything over in this valley for you."

"You don't know my old sky pilot like I do," insisted Doug.

"Yes, you must have got a deep knowledge of him in one night!"

"I sure did!" said Douglas simply.

"You are sure that you realize how bitterly the Valley resents your doing this?"

"Yes. And the Valley had better realize, if it plans trouble, that I'm neither soft, nor easy."

"I just wish you weren't trying to do it," repeated Judith.

"What do you want me to do?" asked Douglas.

"Why, be a first-class rancher, make money, and travel and learn something about life."

"That's what I plan to do. But I want to do more than that. I want to fix Lost Chief so that a couple of kids like you and me don't have to learn all they know about real things from a woman like Inez and a man like Charleton. And if a sky pilot can answer those questions right, why I'm going to have one in here if I have to mount guard on him, day and night. My kids are going to grow up right here in Lost Chief and they aren't going round like little wild horses when it comes to asking questions about love and death. No, ma'am!"

"Oh! What does old Fowler know about such things?" cried Judith.

"That's what I aim to find out," replied Doug.

Twilight was up on the valley, though Falkner's Peak still glowed crimson in outline, and the Forest Reserve to the east was silver blue, shot with lines of flame. The evening star trembled above Fire Mesa. Up on Dead Line Peak behind them, a pack of coyotes barked.

"We miss you down at the house," said Judith suddenly.

Douglas' heart suddenly lifted. There was a sweetness in Judith's voice that he never before had heard there.

"I miss you, Judith! Every moment of the day I'm missing you. The ache for you in my heart is as much a part of my life as my very heart-throbs."

"I wish you wouldn't, Douglas! I wish you wouldn't! I'm not ready to talk of those things!"

"What do you mean, Judith?"

"I mean that I don't see love as you see it; that even if I did care for any one, I'm not ready to give way to it."

She paused as if she too were struggling to express the inarticulate. "O, I am so disappointed in life! It isn't at all what I thought it would be! People aren't what I dreamed they were. Everything is hard and rough and difficult. I don't like life a bit!"

"I don't like it as it is, either," agreed Douglas. "That's why I'm trying to change it, here in Lost Chief. But I wouldn't change my love for you, no matter how it hurts. That's the one beautiful thing in Lost Chief and in me."

He turned to the face, so dimly rebellious, so vaguely sweet in the dark, and his whole soul was in his steady deep voice.

"Judith, won't you marry me? You are my whole life!"

Judith's voice rose passionately. "Don't talk about

it! Don't! I don't believe in marriage. I tell you I don't, Douglas!"

"Why not?"

"I've told you again and again. Marriage is too hard on a woman. Why should I want to cook your meals and darn your socks and wash your clothes for you the rest of my life? Yes, and listen to you swear and lay down the law and spit tobacco juice? And when I'm a little older and beginning to get knotty with the hard work, see you take notice of girls who are younger and prettier than I. No, Doug!"

"O, love isn't like that!" exclaimed Douglas vehemently.

"My love won't be like that, I can tell you!" The excitement still was evident in Judith's voice. "I'm not going to kill it, by marrying."

"I wish that Inez were dead and in hell!" cried Douglas, with such an accumulation of bitterness in his voice that Judith drew a quick breath. "And I wish I could quit loving you! I tried my best to, all the time I was at Charleton's. But I can't! It just grows as I grow and every day it's a bigger pain and trouble to me. I wish I could have peace!"

"I wish I could have it myself!" ejaculated the girl. She rose suddenly. "I'm so tired of this burning struggle. But I won't settle down to being an old horse on a ranch. I will do something that gives me a chance to use my brain. I will!"

She leaped into the saddle.

Douglas seized the mare's bridle. "Just what do you mean by being tired of a burning struggle?" he demanded tensely. "Are you caring for somebody, Jude?"

"Let me go, Douglas," said Judith.

For a moment, the two stared at each other in the fad-

ing light, then Douglas released the bridle and Judith galloped away.

He stood very still for a long time, gazing down the dim line of the trail. How lonely, how very lonely Judith appeared to be! How lonely, for that matter, were most people, pondering in the solitude of their own minds on all the matters of life that really counted. And how utterly impossible it seemed to be for him and Judith to cross the threshold of each other's reticences. More difficult perhaps for Judith than for him. That, perhaps, was because she did not love him. Or perhaps, because she was not capable of feeling sympathy for spiritual hunger. But he put aside this thought, impatiently. No one could have lived with Judith and not have learned that below her tempestuous nature must be deeps greater than even she herself had realized. Why, O why, could he never have more than a glimpse of those deeps! Evidently something more than love was demanded as a password.

He had been able, quickly enough, at her request to formulate his own demands on life. What were Judith's demands? Were they only for a love that should be unhampered by the ordinary facts of life? He knew that this could not be so. Yet, he had grown up with Judith, had asked her to marry him, and had no idea of what her actual mental and spiritual needs might be. Perhaps they were such that he never could satisfy them. Perhaps Judith recognized this. Of course, she recognized it!—as a bitter memory of her picture of marriage in Lost Chief returned to him. With a groan he bowed his head against the smooth trunk of an aspen. How utterly inexplicable women were! How bitter and how beautiful was this scourging fire, called love!

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST SERMON

"I ain't able to think. That's why I'm pretty generally happy." —*Old Johnny Brown.*

BY dawn the next morning Douglas was half-way up the trail to the Pass. He did not know at what hour the preacher would arrive, but he did not propose that the old man should enter Lost Chief without his protection. When he reached the crest, he unsaddled the Moose and settled himself against a gigantic jade rock beside the trail and prepared to wait patiently.

The sun lifted slowly over the unspeakable glory of the ranges and poured its glory down upon the Pass, then swung westward, leaving a chill shadow beside the rock where Douglas was camping. It was mid-afternoon when the stage came through from the half-way house. Old Johnny Brown was driving.

As he pulled up the horses for a rest, he saw Douglas and smiled delightedly.

"Waiting for me, Douglas?"

Douglas shook his head. "I came up to meet a friend, Johnny."

The little old man stared at Douglas; then he said fretfully, "I don't see why Grandma Brown had to go and make me drive the gregus old stage for a week. I deponed to her that I had to get up there and take care of you. When that preacher comes, you'll need me, Doug. There's lots of trouble brewing, boy."

"What kind, Johnny?"

"They always shut up and look rejus when I come round. But I know enough to sabez that bunch even if I am a half-wit."

"I'm not so sure you are a half-wit, Johnny," said Douglas sincerely.

The old man's face brightened. "That's just the way I feel about it too, Douglas. You're the only person in the Valley understands me. You could have my shirt, Doug."

Douglas nodded. "You get through with the stage as soon as you can, Johnny. Tell Grandma I expect you on Monday."

Johnny clucked firmly at his team. "I'll be there. Nothing can't propone me," and he was gone in a cloud of dust.

It was an hour later that the preacher rounded the curve to the crest. Douglas threw the saddle on the Moose and Fowler pulled up his bony blue roan in surprise. He was thinner and grayer than ever and his blue jumper was patched with pieces of burlap. But his eyes were bright as he shook hands with Douglas.

"I'm the Committee on Welcome!" said the young rider.

"How long have you been waiting for me, Douglas?" asked Fowler.

"Since daybreak. I couldn't be sure when you'd come. And I didn't want you to come into Lost Chief alone."

"Are you expecting trouble immediately?" asked the preacher.

"Well," replied Douglas frankly, "the folks are just about as enthusiastic as if I were bringing a Mormon into the Valley. And I just don't aim to give them a chance to start anything till we get a little bit settled."

The old man's jaw set, under his beard. "Humph!

They'll find the Lord and me both ready for them. I have an idea they are going to be surprised before they are through with this."

Douglas nodded and they rode down into the Valley. When they trotted past the post-office, the usual group was gathered on the steps. Doug and the preacher nodded but did not draw rein. Old Sister came out sedately and growled at Prince, but Peter did not leave the doorstep.

"What's your hurry, old-timers?" shouted Jimmy Day.

"A long way to go," called Douglas.

"Your hazer needs a shave!" said some one else.

"We'll do it for him Sunday!" cried another voice.

"Oil up your cannon, Doug," laughed Charleton, "and unchain the dogs of war."

Douglas trotted sedately on.

"I wonder why it is! I wonder why!" said Fowler, very real pain in his voice.

"They think we're criticizing them," answered Douglas; adding, with his pleasant grin, "which we are!"

It was dark when they reached Douglas' ranch. Before they had unsaddled, Fowler insisted on lighting a lantern and inspecting the chapel. Douglas, not at all adverse, for he was very proud of this work of his hands, followed the old man in his microscopic inspection of the little building. It was small and dim, with a smell of new cedar. To Douglas, already there was something hallowed about the quiet interior as if somehow the yearning with which he had builded it had given the insensate wood a curious high purposefulness.

Fowler examined the benches and sat for a moment on several of them. He flashed the lantern along the carefully chinked walls, the rose tints of the cedar glowing warmly back at him. He walked slowly up and

down the center aisle and paused before the platform, on which was a table and chair. For a long time he stood with one hand on the table. Then he said:

"It's beautiful, Douglas! Beautiful! A chapel for me! Built by a young man that has faith in me. Wonderful! And built with such free-hearted care! For me to preach in! Why, a minister of a great metropolis might well envy me such a gift!"

He paused again, turning the lantern so that the tapestried colors of the walls again flashed forth.

"Stained glass!" half whispered the old man. "Already it has the air of a church. Douglas, we'll consecrate it now."

He knelt before the platform and Douglas bowed his head.

"O God, my Father and my Shepherd," said Fowler, "You have led my wandering steps to this fragrant evidence of a young man's heart. How beautiful it is, O God, and how holy, You know. Help me to keep it so, Heavenly Father, and help me to make Lost Chief find it so. And, O God, put Your great arm about this young man and keep it there until he realizes that it is Your arm supporting him. I thank You, O Everlasting Mercy, for leading me to this resting-place for my soul. Amen."

And it seemed to Douglas, bowing his head in the dusk, that the chapel itself was listening in a brooding peace.

After a moment, the old man rose and led the way out the door, which Douglas locked, then turned the key over to the preacher.

"It's yours, now," he said with a little, embarrassed laugh. "I'm only the guard."

Fowler put the key carefully into his pocket. "If

anything should happen to that chapel, it would break my heart," he said.

"We mustn't let anything happen to it. That's our job," returned Douglas stoutly.

The next morning, Saturday, Douglas left the preacher while he went down to his father's place for his day's work. He was as nervous as a mother with her first baby all day and he galloped the Moose back up the trail long before sunset. When Mr. Fowler waved at him from the door of the cabin, he gave a gusty sigh of relief.

While Doug was cooking the bacon for supper he asked the preacher what was to be the subject of the morrow's sermon.

"I was going to preach on the Golden Rule," replied Mr. Fowler.

"No," said Douglas decidedly. "You give 'em a talk on the hereafter and why you think there is one." He lighted a cigarette and cut more bacon.

"Young man, are you presuming to dictate to me how to preach the word of God?"

"I sure am!" grinning with the cigarette between his white teeth. "I'm in this thing up to my horns and I don't aim to make any false moves that I can help. I've been reading the New Testament this summer. So far, the most I've got out of it is that Christ was the most diplomatic preacher that ever lived. Let's be as diplomatic as we can. What's the use of preaching slush to a lot of sensible, hard-thinking folks who don't believe in anything."

The preacher bit his knuckles and took a turn or two up and down the cabin. Douglas noted with a little sense of pity the extreme thinness of the rounded shoulders under the denim jumper. Douglas dished the bacon

and put a loaf of Mary's bread beside the fried potatoes.

"Show us that our souls go marching on like old John Brown's," said the young man, persuasively, "and you'll have all Lost Chief eating out of your hand."

"You talk of faith," cried Fowler impatiently, "as if it were a problem in algebra."

Douglas hesitated. "Maybe I do." His voice suddenly trembled.

Fowler paused as he was about to seat himself at the table. "I hear a horse!" he said.

Douglas went to the door.

"It's just me!" called Grandma Brown's voice. "Come and help me down. I was up to see your mother this afternoon," she went on as Douglas helped her dismount, "and I thought I'd come along up and have a visit with the preacher."

"That's fine!" exclaimed Douglas. "Come in, Grandma. We're just drawing up to the table."

"Good," sighed the old lady; "I'm half starved. Howdy, Mr. Fowler! Haven't had enough of Lost Chief yet, huh?"

The preacher rose and shook hands. "Not yet, Mrs. Brown! Will you draw up?"

The old lady plumped down at the table and Douglas loaded her plate and poured her a cup of coffee. "The older folks," she said abruptly, "won't make you any trouble. Charleton Falkner and some of his pals will be smarty, but the young fry will sure try to break up every meeting you have."

"The modern youngster is pretty rough!" sighed the preacher.

"Here in Lost Chief," agreed Grandma promptly, "they are the most rough-and-tumble, catch-as-catch-can

batch of young coyotes that ever lived. They don't respect God, man, nor the devil. And why should they? That's educated into children, not born into them."

"How do you feel about my coming back, Mrs. Brown?" asked Fowler.

Grandma hesitated; then she said, "I'm too old to be polite, James Fowler. I'm a religious woman, myself, and I've often said we'd ought to have a church in Lost Chief. But it isn't men like you can start a church here. You are too religious and too goody-goody."

The preacher winced. Douglas came to his rescue. "We're going to show Lost Chief that he's not goody-goody."

Grandma shook her head. "I wish you luck, but, with all the nerve in the world, you can't preach to them that won't hear."

"Do you know what deviltry they've planned for to-morrow?" asked Douglas.

Grandma shook her head. "All I know is, Scott Parsons is the leader. He sees a chance to get back at you."

Douglas finished his bacon thoughtfully. "All right," he said finally; "let 'em come. I'm waiting."

"Well," said Grandma briskly, "I didn't come up here to give advice. I wanted a gossip with an old-timer. Mr. Fowler, you was up in Mountain City when that Black Sioux outbreak took place. Did you know Emmy Blake, she that was stolen by old Red Feather?"

"Yes," replied Fowler, with a sudden clearing of his somber face. "I saw her when—" and he plunged into a tale that, matched by one from Grandma, consumed the evening.

At nine o'clock the old lady rose.

"I'll ride down the trail with you," said Douglas.

"You fool!" sniffed the old lady. "Since when have folks begun nursing me over these trails?"

"That's not the point," returned Doug. "I want to see Peter."

"Well, come along, then," conceded Grandma. She pulled on her mackinaw and buttoned it. The nights were very cold.

The next morning, a placard on the post-office door announced to Lost Chief that a meeting would be held in the log chapel on Sunday at two o'clock; and by that hour every soul in Lost Chief capable of moving was packed into the little cabin.

After his talk with Peter, Douglas had changed his program. The postmaster, not the preacher, sat at the table. He wore a black coat over a blue flannel shirt, a coat that Lost Chief never saw except at funerals or weddings. His denim pants were turned up with a deep cuff over his riding-boots. The preacher sat on a chair, just below the platform. Douglas occupied a rear pew where he could keep an eye on Scott Parsons. There was very little talking among the members of the congregation, but much spitting of tobacco juice into the red-hot stove.

Promptly at two o'clock, Peter rose and cleared his throat. "Well, folks, Douglas says he's trying to put into practice some of the stuff I've been preaching to him. So I suppose I'm to blame for this meeting. Now, there isn't anybody can accuse me of being religious."

"A fourth-class postmaster couldn't be religious," remarked Charleton Falkner.

"They always go crazy about the second year of office," volunteered John Spencer.

Everybody laughed, even Peter. Then he went on:

"So when I say I'm going to back Doug up in this experiment you none of you can say it's because I'm pious. It's because I think Lost Chief ought to have a church to help the young people decide the right and wrong of things."

"How come, Peter?" demanded Jimmy Day. "Ain't the young folks round here pleasing to your bachelor eye?"

"To my eye, yes!" answered the postmaster. "Best-looking crowd I ever saw. But to my mind, no! And there isn't one of you over fifteen who doesn't know what I mean when I say it. Now, Doug's idea seems sensible enough to me. He says he'd be happier if he could believe in a life after death. He says if any preacher can prove to him that the soul is immortal, he is willing to play the game so as to win that future if it is proved that you have to follow rules to win it. Folks, if there is anything sissy about that, I'd like to have one of you rear up and say so."

"There isn't a preacher in the world can prove that," said Mrs. Falkner. "If there was, he'd be greater than Christ."

"Didn't Christ prove it?" cried Mr. Fowler quickly.

"No!" replied Mrs. Falkner. "He believed it Himself and He lived like He believed it, but He didn't prove it."

Fowler jumped to his feet. "He proved it over and over; by fulfilling the prophecies, by the miracles He performed and by returning after death."

"How do you know He returned after death?" asked Mrs. Falkner.

"The Bible says so."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Falkner. "The Bible is just history, most of it hearsay. And I read in the

Atlantic the other day that Napoleon said that history was just a lie agreed upon."

"This is blasphemy!" shouted Mr. Fowler. "This is—"

"Wait!" Peter interrupted with a firm hand. "Every one is to say what they decently please. You'll never get anywhere in this valley, if you show yourself shocked by anything anybody says."

"I don't want to shock the preacher, Peter,"—Mrs. Falkner's beautiful face was wistful—"I'd like to have his faith. I sure-gawd would! But I just want to make him see that to folks like us in Lost Chief who read and think and look at these hills a lot, the Bible never could prove a hereafter to us."

"But the Bible is the inspired word of God," insisted Fowler.

"Who says so?" asked Mrs. Falkner.

"The Bible."

"Good heavens, isn't that childish?" she appealed to the congregation. "Seems to me only God could prove that and we don't even know He exists."

There was silence in the room. Douglas, looking over the backs of many familiar heads, felt a curious yearning affection for these neighbors who so far had met his experiment so kindly. Then his eyes turned to the aspens without the window and beyond these to the far red clouds over Fire Mesa. The first snow of the season was beginning to sift through the trees. He wished that he had the courage to ask Mrs. Falkner what she thought of Inez' poem:

> A fire mist and a planet,
> A crystal and a cell—

but he would rather have cut out his tongue than repeat the verse before this audience.

Mr. Fowler was running his fingers through his beard, glancing hesitatingly from Douglas to Peter.

"Well, is it the sense of this meeting," asked the postmaster, "to let the preacher tell us how he feels about it?"

"Go to it, old wrangler," said Charleton. "I can spout the Persian Poet to 'em if you run short of Bible stuff."

"Baa—a—a!" bleated a small boy in the back of the room.

"I'm going to give the first young one that makes a disturbance a dose of aspen switch," said Grandma Brown.

There was a general chuckle that quieted as Mr. Fowler began to speak.

"Religion doesn't rest on proof. It rests on Faith. And faith is something every human being possesses. If you plant a seed, you have faith that it will produce a plant. No power of yours can bring the plant. But you have faith—in what?—that the plant will appear. Every night that you go to bed you believe that a new day will come. You cannot bring that day but you have absolute faith that to-morrow will be brought by—what? The stars come nightly to the sky, the moon and the earth whirl in their appointed places. You have absolute confidence that they will continue to float in the heavens. On what do you place that confidence?

"Friends, I cannot prove to you that there is a God. But if you will be patient with me, I will give you a faith that asks no proof." He opened his Bible and began to read.

"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger and he that believeth in me shall never thirst. . . .

"If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth in me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. . . .

"He that believeth in me, believeth not in me but in Him that sent me. And he that seeth me, seeth Him that sent me. I come a light unto the world, that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness.

"I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Mr. Fowler paused and closed the book.

"Words!" said Charleton. "Just poetry!"

"You are speaking of the living words of the Almighty!" shouted the preacher. "You—" But he was interrupted. There was a sudden unearthly uproar of dogs without. The door burst open and old Sister, howling at the top of her lungs, bolted straight up the aisle to Peter. A can was tied to her tail. Prince, similarly adorned, and ably seconding his old friend's outcry, followed her. Several cats, all dragging tin cans, were flung spitting and yowling through a window.

Chaos reigned. Douglas seized Prince. Peter grabbed Sister. A dozen people took after the cats. They were not as easy to capture as the dogs; and during the progress of the chase, a sudden noxious odor filled the room. Douglas saw a thick black vapor rising from a bubbling mess on the top of the stove. The congregation bolted, leaving the field to one lone cat who climbed the wall to the window and disappeared with a final yowl.

There was no attempt to bring the audience back, and shortly the trail was dotted with riders. But that evening as he sat alone with Douglas, the preacher was not at all sad.

"You were right," he said to the young man, "in having Peter open the meeting. The older people were

interested. No doubt they were interested; and in spite of the mischief that broke us up, I feel as if a start had been made. It's a rarely intelligent group of people. I admit that."

Douglas nodded. "We'll wear 'em down. See if we don't. The kids certainly put it over on me. I was feeling safe as long as I could watch Scott and Jimmy, and they had Grandma Brown's grandson doing the work for them." He chuckled and shook his head. "I just can't head them off on that kind of work. All we can do, as I say, is to wear them down. And maybe we can win Judith and one or two of the others, right soon."

Mr. Fowler sighed. "We can certainly interest some of the older people for a while with a discussion like we had this afternoon. But not the young people. Beauty and emotion and mystery must make the religious appeal to young folks. A church can't exist as a debating society."

Douglas turned this over in his mind, finally focussing his thoughts on Inez; she who loved beauty and dragged her emotions in the mire.

"Mr. Fowler," he said finally, "I'll bet Inez would have been a very religious person if she'd been started with the beauty and emotion and mystery!"

"That's a queer thing to say!" The preacher's voice was a little resentful.

Douglas went on as if he had not heard. "But you can't get Judith that way. She hasn't any emotions except temper and a sense of humor!"

"There isn't a woman born who isn't full of emotion," said Mr. Fowler, dryly. "And the deeper they conceal it, the more they have. I think I'll go to bed, Douglas. I feel as if I'd come through a hard day."

"Same here," agreed Douglas, and shortly the cabin was in darkness.

For a day or so the preacher stayed quietly in and about the cabin. He swept the chapel and cleaned out the stove and polished the windows and each day made a little fire. Douglas frequently found him there at night, on his knees. At least once a day he said, "It was a wonderful thing, Doug, for a young man like you to build me this little chapel, in my old age." He insisted on grace before meals and a chapter aloud from the Bible before bed. Douglas was embarrassed but entirely acquiescent. Mr. Fowler was to have a free hand with his spiritual development.

About the middle of the week, Judith rode down to the post-office with Douglas. "Well, how's the sky pilot and his disciple?" she asked.

"I believe the old boy is almost happy," replied Douglas. "He thinks that little old church I built is pretty fine."

"Inez says it looks like a big cow stable."

"That's nice of Inez. Why didn't she tell me how to make it better looking?"

"What does Inez care about it? Honest, Doug, you are making an awful fool of yourself. A man like Fowler can't preach to us."

"Why, he never had a chance to preach here yet!" exclaimed Douglas. "And, what do you expect in a place like Lost Chief, a ten-thousand-dollar-a-year sky pilot? Besides, I don't want preaching from him. I want just the one thing like Peter said. And Fowler has that in him just as strong as the highest paid preacher in the world. Give him a show, Judith. Come up, every Sunday. You might back me that much."

"And have everybody in the crowd laughing at me

like they are at you? I won't do anything against the old man, Douglas, for your sake. But that's all I'll promise."

"I'm not going to let you off that easy, Jude. Come up to supper to-night. I won't let him talk religion. Honest, he's as interesting as a book when he gets to telling some of his experiences."

Judith shook her head. "I'd rather stay at home with 'Pendennis.' "

"If I get Inez to come, will you?" urged Douglas.

Judith grinned impishly. "Yes, I'd come with Inez."

They returned from the post-office via the west trail and stopped at Inez' place. She was eating a belated dinner in her slatternly kitchen, and waved a hospitable hand over the table.

"Thanks, no," said Doug. "I just stopped by to see if you and Judith wouldn't come up and have supper with the sky pilot and me. I won't let him talk religion and he's got some good stories to tell."

Inez looked Douglas over. He and the tall Judith seemed to fill the kitchen. Doug finally had covered his big frame with muscles and he was a larger and handsomer man than his father.

"Doug," said Inez, "I am truly flattered. What are you trying to do? Convert me?"

Douglas answered with simple sincerity. "I don't care a hang whether you get converted or not."

"O you don't! Well, just to spite you, I'll come and let the old fellow try his hand!"

"Not really, Inez?" gasped Judith.

"I'd do more than that for Doug and for Lost Chief," said Inez soberly. "Doug isn't the only person who loves this old hole in the hills."

Judith turned to Douglas with a sudden wistfulness

in her eyes, a sudden flare of a fire he had not seen in them before. He waited for her to speak but she only turned away toward the door.

"I'll look for you about six then, Inez," he said, and he followed Judith.

When the girls appeared at the cabin that evening, the table was set and the steak was frying. Inez and Judith winked at each other when Mr. Fowler said grace but otherwise the meal progressed decorously enough. It was Inez who brought up the tabooed subject. They had been sitting round the stove listening to a tale of old lynch law which the preacher told with real skill, when Inez interrupted him with entire irrelevance.

"Mr. Fowler, do you really believe there is such a thing as right and wrong?"

The preacher paused, studying Inez' face. Her dark eyes were steady and thoughtful. Her mouth, except for the slightly heavy lower lip, was sensitive. Her whole expression was one of pride and independence.

"Yes, I believe in right and wrong," replied Mr. Fowler, deliberately.

"What makes you believe that a man who lived nearly two thousand years ago can decide what is right or wrong for Lost Chief?" she asked.

"The Bible," answered the preacher.

"But the Bible is full of things that I would call crooked. Those prophets were always putting slick tricks over on each other and the people. There was a lot of dirty work done in the name of the Lord by those ancient Jews."

The preacher leaned toward the woman. "Do you believe in right and wrong, Inez Rodman?"

"No, I don't. I believe in kindness and in beauty. That's all."

"How does one believe in beauty?" asked Mr. Fowler.

"I mean," she replied, "that if you fill your mind with the beauty of this Lost Chief country and with poetry, there is no room for anything ugly."

"What would you call ugly?"

"Being mean to other people is one kind of ugliness."

"That's what I believe too," said Judith suddenly.

"Then, of course, neither of you two would have anything to do with the attempt to run the preacher out," suggested Douglas.

"No, I wouldn't," replied Inez; "and I told Scott so. That doesn't mean that I don't consider you plumb loco, Doug. Mr. Fowler isn't the kind to make the folks see the beauty of these hills. If he was I'd be helping instead of indifferent."

"If the folks would let God enter their hearts," cried the preacher, "they'd see beauty in these hills they never dreamed of."

"Well, as far as beauty goes, Inez," Douglas spoke thoughtfully, "you can't say there isn't considerable of that in the Bible. Take the Songs of Solomon. There never was finer love-making than that!"

"The Songs of Solomon don't deal with human passion," said Mr. Fowler hastily. "They are a recital of man's love for the Almighty and His works."

"O, no, Mr. Fowler!" cried Doug. "'Behold thou art fair, my loved one, behold thou art fair. Thou hast doves eyes within thy locks.' No man ever said that about anything but a woman."

No one spoke for a moment. Old Prince, who was lying with his head baking under the stove, growled and barked, then made for the door. Wolf Cub barked without, and a dog answered.

"Sister!" exclaimed Inez. "Peter must be coming."

Douglas opened the door and Prince shot out. Shortly Peter, then Charleton, came in, stamping the snow from their spurs and pulling off their gauntlets.

"Where did you two come from?" asked Judith, as the newcomers established themselves on up-ended boxes close to the stove.

"Just met here," replied Peter. "I had supper at Spencer's and came up to argue with the sky pilot."

"I'm setting traps up on Lost Chief," said Charleton, lighting a cigarette.

"Look out you don't mistake any of Scott's traps for yours," suggested Inez.

Everybody chuckled, and Peter said, "Elijah Nelson was down at my place yesterday. He's a pleasant, easy spoken man. I guess he and Scott have been having a lot of quiet fighting up there we haven't heard about."

"Is that what he came to see you about?" asked Doug.

"No. It seems his trail out to the Mountain City road is snowed up. He wants to get his mail over here if Scott will let him use his trail. He wants me to speak to Scott about it."

"What Scott will claim," Charleton smiled, "is that he positively must have a retired location and complete privacy on his trail."

There was another chuckle, during which the preacher looked from one keen face to another, but he did not speak.

"What has the scrapping been about, Peter?" asked Inez.

Douglas turned quietly to look at her. It suddenly occurred to him that Inez used Peter's name with a cadence that was new to him. He saw that she was watching Peter's thin sallow face with a shadow of strain about her eyes.

"O it's about a bull again," laughed Peter. "It seems that Scott has an old red bull that Nelson says is one of his, rebranded."

"But I thought," began Judith; then she caught Charleton's sardonic eye and subsided.

"What did you think, Judith?" asked Peter.

"Nothing. Go on with your story."

"There is no story to it. Scott's been keeping a six-shooter guard on the upper springs of Lost Chief, so's old Nelson hasn't had but half his usual allowance of water for his ditches. He is sorer about that than he is over the bull, though he certainly is determined to get the critter back. But he got small comfort out of me. I told him to keep his plural fingers off of Lost Chief Creek, or he would lose more than an old red bull."

"Right-o!" grunted Charleton.

"Are you going to ask Scott to let Nelson use his trail, Peter?" asked Inez.

"Sure! Why not?" laughed Peter.

"You will make Scott sore at you," replied Inez. "I haven't any quarrel with Scott myself, but I know he has a mean streak in him. If he thinks you are in cahoots with Nelson he will make you trouble."

"I'm not afraid of Scott," said Peter.

"Well, you'll need to be if you mix up in his affairs. He holds grudges over nothing."

"Awful bad man, Scott!" Douglas spoke with his quiet smile.

"I'm telling you he is!" insisted Inez. "He's been more than half in love with Judith for years and he'd just as soon double-cross Jude as anybody else. I want you to let him alone, please, Peter."

Peter was watching Judith. Only Douglas seemed aware of the concentrated entreaty in Inez' voice. "Poor

Inez," he thought, "if she's caring for Peter, she'll be having her own little double Hades for everything she's done." He looked at Peter. Judith was staring thoughtfully at the stove and the postmaster's deep eyes were fastened on the girl's fine, clean-cut features, with a burning fire that suddenly brought Doug's heart to his throat.

"What's your opinion of Scott, Judith?" asked Peter.

"The same as Inez'. But I can't help liking him. He's done me lots of favors and he's kept me from making a fool of myself a number of times, even if he did double-cross me once. And he admires me. He certainly does!" She laughed with girlish naïveté and the others joined her.

"Then you must like me too!" said Peter.

"You are a nice old gentleman," retorted Judith.

Peter's lips closed grimly.

The preacher spoke with sudden vehemence. "Yet you people are allowing this same Scott to try to destroy Douglas' dream for Lost Chief."

"I say Scott is a valuable citizen," drawled Charleton. "He guards us from Mormons, from Christians, and from wild women."

Douglas did not join in the laugh that greeted this sally. An entirely new fear had come upon him. He bit his lip and stared from Judith to Peter and back again.

Inez rose suddenly. "Well, the moon is up. Come, Judith! It's time for wild women to retire to their caves."

Judith gave a gigantic yawn, stretched her beautiful long body till the tips of her fingers almost touched the low rafters, and said, "It's a good thing Charleton and

Peter will be going along to protect us from Scott, the bad man."

The four presently jingled off down the snowy trail. Prince took up his shivering night-watch on the steps. Douglas and Mr. Fowler looked at each other soberly and went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII

PRINCE GOES MARCHING ON

"A wise dog won't tackle a trapped wolverine."
—Old Prince.

THE next morning Johnny Brown trotted up on his old cow-pony. The preacher and Douglas were at breakfast. All the world was bristling with frost and a million opalescent lights danced on every snowdrift. Douglas swung the door open.

"Well, Johnny, did you finally break away from everybody?"

The little old man slid briskly from the saddle, brushed the icicles from his beard, and grinned broadly.

"Even Inez, she tried to stop me. Says some one has got to get her some cedar wood for her heater stove. 'You get you some squaw-wood, Inez,' I deponed. 'Them that can't make the men chop regular wood for 'em, don't deserve nothing better than brittle stuff like alder. Get you some squaw-wood, Inez,' I deponed. Douglas, they are plumb jealous of you. Since you seen there was something to me beside a old half-wit, they've all been horning round, jealous like, to get me."

Douglas, his yellow hair a glory in the rising sun, nodded seriously.

"Look to your saddle, Johnny, then come in to breakfast. I've got a few steers I want to dehorn to-day, so you're just in time."

The preacher was still at breakfast when old Johnny came in. The two old men stared at each other with unmixed interest. Douglas stood with his back to the

stove, a cigarette drooping from his lips, a remote twinkle in his eyes.

Johnny lushed down his second saucer of coffee before he attempted to marshall his thoughts into speech. But, having accomplished this, he said, "Doug and me are gregus great friends, Mr. Fowler. There ain't anybody in Lost Chief thinks as much of him as I do."

The preacher nodded. "Douglas says he's fond of you."

"I guess he is," returned Johnny, condescendingly. "I guess if the truth be deponed he's fonder of me than he is of anybody—excepting maybe Judith. And Judith, she sure-gawd don't apregate Doug like I do, even if I am a half-wit. Judith's awful smart but she ain't got much sense."

"Judith is pretty fine, Johnny!" exclaimed Douglas, with the faint glow in his blue eyes that mention of her name always brought.

"Yes, she is," agreed Johnny. "But she's just like her mother was. All fire. And you can squench fire so it's just ashes. It would be a gregus good thing for the Valley if John Spencer was to break his neck."

"Don't say that, Johnny!" protested the preacher. "After all, he's one of God's creatures."

Johnny chuckled. "Now, who is half-witted, huh?"

"Young Jeff back on the mail route, Johnny?" asked Douglas hastily.

"Yes. Peter Knight, he's awful fond of Judith."

Douglas looked at Johnny keenly, his jaw setting as he did so. Was there, he thought, something obvious here, or was it only the half-wit's curiously sharp but confused intuition at work? At any rate, he must know the truth. He could not endure this added uneasiness.

"On second thoughts," he said aloud, "I think I'll not

dehorn to-day. I want to get an order off for a new saddle on to-day's mail stage. Johnny, one of your main jobs is to guard the sky pilot and the chapel, when I'm not here. You're not to let anything happen to either of them."

"Shall I shoot on sight?" demanded the little old man.

Mr. Fowler smiled. Douglas shook his head. "No; let's not get into that kind of trouble. You don't carry a gun anyhow, do you?"

"No," plaintively. "Grandma won't let me. But I thought you'd loan me something."

"I haven't got anything but my old six-shooter, which I can't spare. Listen, Johnny! When you think somebody needs to be shot, you come to me and tell me about it, see? You know I know you have a lot more self-control than these Lost Chief folks think you have. You aren't one of these guys that shoots first and thinks afterward."

Johnny turned to the preacher triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you he was my friend?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Mr. Fowler, "and he's mine too, and you and I must take care of him. Lost Chief needs him."

Old Johnny rose and solemnly offered a gnarled hand to the preacher. Douglas laughed in an embarrassed way and went out to the corral, to saddle the Moose.

Judith was feeding the chickens as he trotted past the Spencer place. He waved his hand but would not permit himself to stop. He found Peter alone in his room, mending a belt.

"Well, Doug," he said, "how does the reform movement progress?"

"We added Johnny Brown to our side this morning," replied Douglas. "Some line-up, I'd say!"

"Old Johnny is certainly your man," Peter chuckled. "How do he and the sky pilot hit it off?"

"It's too early to say. By the way, did you have a run-in with Scott?"

"Not at all. Scott said Elijah was welcome to use the trail if he kept to it."

Doug's mouth opened and closed. He took a letter from his pocket and laid a pile of bills beside it on the table. "Will you send that mail order off for me today, Peter? I'm blowing myself to a new saddle."

"Must be money in staking a sky pilot," grinned the postmaster. "I didn't notice you taking up a collection on Sunday, though."

Douglas laughed. "It pays so well that I've got to ride the traps again this winter to pay for the grubstake. Dad is so sore that he isn't allowing me all he might."

"I'll help you if you are too much squeezed. I hope you won't be as bull-headed about taking a loan from me as Judith is. By the way, how are matters coming between you and Jude, Douglas?"

"Report no progress!" grunted Doug.

"She's a restless young colt. I wish she could begin to get a sense of direction as you are. Maybe she will, now she can get a bird's-eye view of you. You've always lived too close to each other to understand each other. You'll learn a lot about Jude and she about you, now you've moved a few miles away."

"Do you honestly want me to have Judith, Peter?" asked Douglas with a sudden huskiness in his voice.

Peter, who was standing by the window examining the buckles of the belt, looked up at Douglas with surprise in the lift of his eyebrows. After a moment, he said, "What are you driving at, Doug?"

Douglas took a quick turn up and down the room, then halted before Peter, his sensitive mouth twitching, his blue eyes glowing. It seemed to him that he could not ask the question that must be asked; but finally he spoke, in a voice that was tense in the effort for self-control.

"Peter, I've thought of nothing else since last night. Something about the way you looked at her—! You are the best friend that I have, Peter, but I can't give Judith up, even to you; it would be like trying to tear the veins out of my body. She's my life, Judith is!"

The older man put the rider's belt carefully on the window-ledge, walked over to the table and slowly filled his pipe. When he had filled it, he laid it down beside the belt, put his hands in his pocket, and turned to Doug, who, with the cold sweat standing on his forehead, was watching Peter's every movement. The wind swept snow down through the sod roof. It hissed faintly on the stove. Peter's long face was knotted and hard.

"You have given me a shock, Douglas," he said at last. "You've given me a shock!"

Douglas' heart thudded heavily. It was true, then! Peter did care, though perhaps he had not realized it before.

Peter went on, with painful concentration on Douglas' blue eyes. "I hadn't known it, till this minute, Doug. I thought I was through. I'm fifty-six. God! Does life never finish with a man?" He laughed drearily. "Don't look at me like that, Douglas! You and I will never be rivals! This sort of thing can't undo me again. I swear it!"

He paced the room again, and once more paused before the young rider. "Not that I underestimate the strength of the thing. Who knows so well as I that

love is the most powerful force in the world? Mind you, Doug, I make a sharp distinction between love and lust. Lust can be controlled by any one. Love can be controlled by a man as old as I am. But when love grips a young fellow like you, he is powerless to throw it off. I'd be a cur, Douglas, at my age, to refuse to throttle a love that would conflict with you—the man I like best in the world."

He paused. Douglas did not stir. Peter lifted his pipe, laid it down, and set a match carefully beside it.

"Douglas," he said, "my market is made. I sold my birthright for a mess of pottage. Whatever regrets or grief I may have are just. To contemplate a girl like Judith having any interest in me, is ghastly. Judith is yours, whether she realizes it or not. Will you stay for dinner?"

He put his pipe in his mouth and lighted it. Douglas gave a long, uncertain sigh.

"No, thanks, Peter! I must get back to my sky pilot. You will be at the log chapel early on Sunday?"

"Yes. But you'd better let him handle the meeting. Have him preach on immortality. You've sort of got them going on that."

Douglas nodded, put his hand on the door-knob, then turned back.

"Peter, does life never finish with a man? Don't you find peace anywhere along the line?"

"Not your kind of a man. There are a number of sure springs in the desert, though, where a man can be certain of a mighty pleasant camp. But it's only a camp."

Douglas moistened his lips. "What can a fellow do about it?" he demanded.

"Well," replied the older man, "he can make up his

mind to find it devilishly interesting, even the dry marches."

The young rider threw back his head. "Me—I'm going to find more than interest! I'll find color and some thrills, too. See if I don't!"

Peter laughed grimly. "Yes, you'll find a thrill or two but always where you least expect it."

Douglas' smile was twisted. He opened the door and went out into the wind-swept day. Smoke drove horizontally from the low chimneys that dotted the valley. Cattle bellowed as if in disconsolate protest against the ruthless on-march of winter. Douglas, in spite of the last few words with Peter, was in a curiously uplifted frame of mind which for some time he could not dissect. Part of it he knew to be relief from the sudden suspicion that had overwhelmed him, but he was half-way home before he told himself that Peter's essential fineness had revived his faith in the goodness and kindliness in human nature. In a life where one could know a Peter, he thought, there must be beauty and a kind of beauty that Inez could neither find nor appreciate. Poor old Inez!

The dinner hour was long past when he jingled along the trail past his father's place. On sudden impulse he turned the Moose into the yard. Judith opened the door. She was in sweater and riding-skirt. Her black hair was bundled up under a round beaver cap under which her bright beauty glowed in a way to lift a far less interested heart than Doug's.

"Hello, Douglas!"

"Hello, Judith! Where are you going?"

"Just out to jump the little wild mare. Where have you been?"

"Down to the post-office. I saw Dad heading for Charleton's."

"Yes, I'm alone. Mother went over to Grandma's. The old lady is ailing."

Douglas jumped from the saddle. "You haven't mentioned it, but, thanks, I will come in. Is there any grub in the house? I haven't had dinner yet."

Judith laughed. "I was expecting that! I just finished my own. Come along!"

Douglas ate his dinner while Judith watched with speculative eyes.

"Peter is a funny old duck," she said finally.

"Funny? How?"

"O, he's so lonely and so cross and such good company and so kind! I'd like to have known him when he was young."

Douglas looked at her closely. "Jude, could you get to care for Peter if you thought he cared for you?"

"Who, me? Peter? What's the matter with you, Doug? Why, Peter is as old as Dad!"

"What difference does that make?"

"It wouldn't make any difference if I cared for him," admitted Judith, tapping thoughtfully on the tablecloth with slim brown fingers.

"But do you care for him, Judith?" insisted Douglas.

Judith's fine lips twisted contemptuously. "What an idiot you are, Doug!"

"Do you, hang it? Answer me, Jude!"

"No! No! No! Does that satisfy you?"

"Well, partially. Guess I'll have to ask Inez the same question."

Judith smiled and shrugged her shoulders. Douglas went on.

"I'll bet if you could get the truth out of Inez, Judith, you'd find her suffering torments because she can't marry."

"Can't marry? Why can't Inez marry?" demanded Judith belligerently.

"Because no decent man would marry her," returned Douglas flatly.

Judith laughed. "You poor old male, you! Will you kindly tell me what man in this valley you consider more decent than Inez?"

"I'm decent," said Douglas, flushing, but not the less firmly.

Judith's eyes softened. "You've kept that promise, Doug?"

"Yes," briefly. "And I wouldn't have a woman like Inez if she was as beautiful as Cleopatra and as rich as Hetty Green!"

"Well," airily, "that eliminates you, of course. But let me warn you, Douglas, that if Inez Rodman really loved a man and wanted to marry him, he'd have about as much chance as a coyote used to have when Sister was young enough to run them. Only, if Inez ever does love a man, she won't marry him. She'll keep herself a mystery to him. 'And forever would he love and she be fair.'"

"What's that you're quoting?" asked Douglas.

Judith, her eyes on the window through which shouldered the great flank of Dead Line Peak, repeated the immortal lines. When she had finished, Douglas sighed.

"It's very beautiful!" he said. "But life isn't a procession round a Grecian Urn. It's hard riding from start to finish. And it's a poor sport that won't accept that fact and ride according to the rules. Marriage is one of the rules. I believe in it."

Judith walked slowly round the table and put a hand on either shoulder. There was a baffling light in her splendid gray eyes as she said, "Douglas, do you think for a minute that if I told you I loved you madly, I couldn't persuade you not to marry me?"

Her touch was flame. Douglas drew a long, uncertain breath.

"If you said that you loved me madly, you could do almost anything with me, I suppose. The only thing that keeps me steady is believing that you don't love me."

Judith smiled curiously. Douglas lifted her hands from his shoulders. "Don't torture me, Jude," he said, his voice husky and his fingers uncertain, as he lighted a cigarette.

"I wouldn't torture you, any more than I'd torture myself," replied Judith.

She leaned against the window-frame, looking out at the serenity of the mountain.

"Life," she said suddenly, "is like climbing to the top of Falkner's Peak. Terribly difficult and frightfully wearing, but O, what marvelous views as you reach shoulder after shoulder! Inez is beginning to find life rather a dreary kind of mess. But not I! The Lord knows, my life looks stupid to every one but me, and the Lord knows, I'm restless and unhappy. But I never stop thinking for a minute that it's great, just great to be alive and I— and alive."

Douglas smiled a little uncertainly. "Do you ever think twice the same way, Jude?"

"Once in a while! In fact, I'm getting that way more and more. You'll see! I'm going to get me educated, Douglas, and find me a real job. See if I don't!"

Douglas put on his gloves. "I couldn't be any prouder

of you, Judith, if you had all the education in the world. Don't forget to come up on Sunday."

"I suppose I'll have to lend my support," said Judith. "But I still think you are a fool."

"You can think me all the fools you want to, if you'll just keep backing me," replied Douglas, striding out to the whinnying Moose.

He found old Johnny and the preacher on terms of easy friendship. Johnny was inclined to be patronizing but Douglas caught the twinkle in Fowler's eyes and made no attempt to control Johnny's manners.

It was not until nearly bed time that Doug missed Prince. The old dog was gradually giving up the solitary coyote hunts he had taken in his younger days and, contrary too, to his earlier habits, he now liked to sleep indoors. He was usually shivering on the doorstep waiting for a chance to scramble under the stove when Doug went out to look at the stock for the night.

But to-night he was not there, nor did his short bark come in response to Doug's whistling. Old Johnny and the preacher came to the door.

"Stop your whistling and listen, Douglas," suggested Fowler.

Douglas obeyed, and faintly on the frosty air sounded the reiterated yelps of a dog.

"That's Prince and he's in trouble!" exclaimed Doug.

"He's up on the shoulder of Lost Chief, I depone," said Johnny.

"I'll go up there." Douglas took his rifle from behind the door and hurried out to the corral. The two men followed him, and by the time Doug had buckled on his spurs, they had saddled his horse.

"Either he's got into a trap or he's tackled something

too big for him," said Douglas; "and it's up to me to look out for my pal."

The moon had risen and the snow was very light. Prince continued to yelp and it was not long before Douglas found the dog's tracks and was able to follow them without difficulty. They led up to the tree line on the east flank of Lost Chief Peak. The yelps appeared to come from not far within the border of pines.

Douglas chuckled. "He sure has bitten off more than he can chew this time! I'll have to tell that old dog that—"

A revolver shot interrupted his thoughts. The yelps abruptly ceased. Douglas spurred his horse and in a moment saw the figure of a man standing beside an outcropping rock. It was Charleton Falkner. Douglas threw himself from his horse. Prince, his paw in a trap, lay motionless on the ground beside the badly mangled body of a wolverine. Charleton's face in the moonlight was coolly vindictive.

"I'll teach a dog to spoil a pelt for me!" he said. "He didn't realize there were two traps here."

"But that was my dog, Prince!" exclaimed Doug.

"I don't care if it was the Almighty's dog! He can't rob my traps if I know it!" snarled Charleton.

Douglas advanced slowly. "You don't seem to get the idea, Charleton. That was my old dog that grew up with me—the faithfulest little chap in Lost Chief. I'd have paid you for the pelt and you know it. What did you shoot him for?"

Charleton's jaws worked. "I'll show you and Scott and the whole valley that my traps and my hunts are not to be interfered with!"

"Still you don't get the idea." Douglas was now not an arm's-length from Charleton. "You can't shoot a

man's dog, at least this man's dog and go unpunished. You and Dad have bullied this valley long enough, Charleton. Put up your hands and take your punishment."

He struck the six-shooter from Charleton's hand and the battle was joined. Douglas' only advantage over his adversary was in point of youth, for Charleton was as lean and powerful as a gorilla. But youth was a powerful ally and eventually it was Charleton who lay in the snow, blinking at the moon. Douglas, panting and still so angry that it was difficult for him not to kick Charleton where he lay, released Prince's paw and threw the familiar gray body across the saddle. Then he mounted, laying Prince across his knees.

Charleton sat up slowly.

"That licking wasn't all for poor old Prince," said Douglas. "Part of it was for the kid whose mind you deliberately tried to poison, and part of it is for Inez. You were the first man, you boasted to me, who ever went to Rodman's. And part of it's for the loneliness you've made in Lost Chief. What have you got to say—huh?"

Charleton rose. "Nice young buck you are to attack a man old enough to be your father! This is what I get for my kindness to you. This is a bad night's work for you, you young whelp!"

Douglas, one hand on his old dog's stiffening shoulder, bit back his resurging wrath and tapped his horse with the spurs. Fowler and Old Johnny came out to meet him. He gave Prince to Johnny and then dismounted.

"Charleton shot my dog!" he said.

"What shall I do with him?" asked Johnny.

"Shut him up in the feed shed and I'll bury him in the morning." Douglas stalked into the house, where

the two others shortly followed him. They looked at his face and for a moment even old Johnny hesitated to speak. In spite of his cold ride, Doug's face was deadly white, his lips worked, and his eyes were dark with feeling. He took off his spurs slowly, and hung them carefully on their nail. Then he sat down on his bunk and stared at the preacher.

"What happened, Douglas?" asked Fowler.

"Prince evidently tackled a wolverine in one of Charleton's traps and I'm not so sure either but it might have been Scott's. Anyhow he surprised some kind of a deal Charleton was trying to put over. Then he got his paw in a free trap and started yelping. Charleton got to him before I did and shot him."

"What was he doing riding his traps at this hour?" asked the preacher.

"I don't know. I loved that dog and so did Jude. It will make her sick when she hears. He was good for two or three years more and he should have died like a good rancher, right at home, here."

"What did you say to Charleton?"

"I said what I thought beside knocking him down."

Fowler said nothing more but he put his hand on Doug's knee. Doug cleared his throat and rose ostensibly to put a stick of wood in the stove.

Old Johnny picked up the rifle and started for the door.

"Where are you going, Johnny?" asked Douglas, huskily.

"I'm going to watch. Charleton he ain't never going to stop now till he fixes you. He's got to get me first. Maybe I ain't as smart as Prince was but I depone I'll do my best."

Douglas laughed a little brokenly. He put his arm

around old Johnny's shoulder and with his free hand took the gun.

"Don't you worry about me, Johnny. Your job is the church and the preacher and you remember you promised not to shoot until you told me about it."

"That's right," exclaimed the preacher. "And now I suggest that you let me read a chapter from the Bible and that we then get to bed."

Johnny looked at Douglas in embarrassment, but Douglas nodded and his old guard sat down beside him on the bunk with a contented sigh.

" 'I am the true vine and my father is the husbandman.—As the Father hath loved me so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.—This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.—Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.' " Fowler closed the book and bowed his head over it. "O God," he prayed, "give us patience and kindness and understanding. Amen."

He rose then and Douglas, vaguely comforted by the sympathy of the two old men, went to bed and to sleep. It had been a day of such stress as even his young years of mental conflicts had seldom endured.

The next day, when Douglas went down to the Spencer ranch to borrow the paraphernalia for dehorning, his father beckoned him mysteriously into the cowshed. John had been surly for six months and Douglas was surprised to hear the note of gratification in his voice.

"What have you been doing to Charleton, Doug?"

"What does he say I've been doing?" asked Douglas, picking the snow out of his spurs.

"He says you knocked him down. He came in here last night breathing fire."

"Did he say why I knocked him down?"

"Yes. Because he wouldn't let your dog rob his traps."

"Prince got after a wolverine in his or Scott's traps and Charleton shot the old pup. He'd better be thankful I didn't boot him all the way home."

Douglas' face was growing white again. John looked at his tall son with a mixture of admiration and bewilderment in his eyes.

"By the Great Sitting Bull, Doug, I can't understand you! Here you go for six months making a blank sissy of yourself over a sky pilot and then you give the most dangerous man in the Valley the gol-dingest mauling and beating he ever had in his life! Why, even I won't go up against Charleton. He's a bad man!"

"He's a bag of wind!" said Douglas contemptuously. "I found that out years ago when his boy was born. Does Jude know?"

"No; she was asleep and he stayed in the kitchen with me and washed up. But don't think you've finished with him. He's a mean man, Douglas."

"Yes, he's mean enough. On the other hand, Charleton knows I've got his number and he'll let me alone. I'm not worrying about him. That guy can't even keep his temper. Loan me the tar-pot, will you, and the searing-iron."

John suddenly laughed. Douglas grinned faintly, then said, "I know now how Jude felt when you shot that little old Swift horse."

"I suppose if you'd been big enough, you'd have treated me as you did Charleton," said John cheerfully.

"I sure would have tried to," replied Douglas. "Where's Jude?"

"Working on the little wild mare in the corral."

Douglas nodded to his father and went in search of Judith. She nodded gaily from the saddle.

"Why so sober, old-timer?"

"Overwork!" exclaimed Douglas. "Jude, will you come up and help me with the handful of steers I want to dehorn?"

"What's the matter with Old Gentlemen's Home?" asked Judith with her impish smile.

"They are taken up with reforming each other," replied Douglas; adding more seriously, "they are too old to be much help with the rope, Jude."

"I know," she nodded. "I'll come right along."

It was not until they had nearly reached Doug's corral that he found courage to tell her about the death of Prince. She said nothing, for a moment, but she brought the mare up close to the Moose and laid her hand on Douglas' knee.

"Dear old boy!" she said. "I know!" Then she sobbed for a moment against his shoulder. But when he would have put his arm about her she straightened herself and said, "But weren't you glad you were strong enough to thrash him!"

"Yes!" replied Douglas.

They said no more about it, but after the dehorning was done, Douglas saw Judith stand for a long time beside the chapel. He knew how her heart was aching, for she too was a lover of dogs.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BATTLE OF THE BULLS

"The free plains were wonderful, but Judith's hand on my bit is more wonderful."

—*The Little Wild Mare.*

DOUGLAS felt somehow, after this day, that Judith was nearer to him. Not that she changed in her manner at all, but there was an indefinable something about her that gave him hope: hope strong enough at least to put up a creditable struggle with the despair that was forever creeping upon him at unguarded moments.

He slept in the chapel on Saturday night, just to make sure that no mischief was done under cover of the darkness. And on Sunday, Mr. Fowler preached an uninterrupted sermon. Scott was present, giving apparently an undivided ear to the preacher's discourse. Charleton was there, too. He ignored Douglas entirely. He had probably told no one of his trouble with Douglas and, knowing Douglas, he apparently felt that Lost Chief would remain in ignorance of the fight. So his saturnine face was as serenely insolent as ever, barring the remains of a very black eye.

Considered from an entirely detached point of view, the sermon was a thing of exceeding beauty. Inez should have been satisfied. The old preacher had a fine voice and he spoke without notes. Many a noted interpreter of the gospel might have envied him his control of voice and language.

The text was one of the most intriguing in the Bible. "Jesus said, I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more. But ye see me. Because I live, ye shall live also." Around about this, Mr. Fowler wove picture after picture of passionate faith in an hereafter. He told of the death of his own father, who with the death-rattle in his throat had sat erect in his bed crying, "O Christ, I see your face at last!"

He told of hardened criminals who had heard God's voice in their dreams. He told of children, who like little Samuel had been called by the Almighty in a voice as articulate as that of their own fathers. He told of the authenticity of the Biblical history of Christ and of the scientific explanations of Christ's miracles. He told of the faith of the ancestors of the people of Lost Chief, a faith which had led them across the Atlantic and through those first terrible years on the bleak New England shores. He concluded with a prayer for the return of the sheep to the fold, a prayer delivered with tears pouring down his weather-beaten cheeks, a prayer delivered in anguish of spirit and in a voice of heart-moving sincerity.

At the end, he sank into his chair by the table and covered his eyes with his shaking hand. Lost Chief sat silent for a moment, then Grandma Brown said in a quavering voice, "Let us sing *Rock of Ages*." But only she knew the words, and after a single verse she stopped, in some embarrassment.

Charleton coughed, yawned and rose. The little congregation followed him out into the yard, where horses and dogs were milling the half-melted snow into yellow muck.

"Well, Grandma," asked Charleton as he helped the

old lady into her saddle, "what did you think of the sermon?"

"A pretty good sermon!" replied Grandma. "Made me feel like a girl again."

"My gawd, Grandma," exclaimed Charleton, "do you mean to say that an old Indian fighter like you swallowed that stuff!"

"I was believing that stuff before you were born, Charleton! If Fowler is going to keep this pace up, I'll say I'm sorry I ever called him a sissy. What did you think of it, Peter?"

Peter was leaning thoughtfully against his horse. "It was interesting. Ethics, as such, are too cold to interest most folks. So we sugar-coat 'em with flowery speech and sleight-of-hand and try to give 'em authority with a big threat. Then some hard-head like Charleton says, because the sugar-coating is silly, that there is nothing to ethics. Which is where he talks like a fool."

He whistled to Sister and trotted homeward. There was considerable elation in Doug's cabin that evening. The preacher said little but old Johnny was in fine fettle.

"Guess we showed 'em!" he said, frying the bacon with a skilled hand. "I bet we had words in that sermon none of 'em ever dreamed of before. You'd ought to use 'gregus,' Mr. Fowler. It's a hard word and so's depone. I told Grandma to come up Sunday and we'd have words looked out that would sure twist her gullet to say."

Mr. Fowler was seized with a sudden coughing fit from which he merged into violent laughter.

"What did your sister say?" he asked when he found his voice.

"She told me not to go any crazier than I already was,

and I deponed to her how Doug felt about me, and she went home."

The sermon had indeed gone so well and the week that followed was so peaceful that Douglas did not sleep in the chapel on the following Saturday night. When Mr. Fowler unlocked the door on Sunday morning, a skunk fled from under the pulpit out into the aspens, and there was no service that day.

On the next Sunday, Charleton gave an all-day dance in the post-office hall and only half a dozen of the older people appeared at the chapel, to listen to a sermon on the Resurrection. He repeated the dance for three Sundays in succession and Douglas was in despair. Old Johnny was deeply wrought up over Douglas' state of mind, and one Saturday night he disappeared, returning at dawn. On that Sunday it was found that the stove in the dance-hall had disappeared and a check was put upon Charleton's competition.

And still, with no dances to rival the sermons, the attendance at the log chapel grew smaller and smaller. The lack of interest that was growing, now that the Valley's first curiosity had been satisfied, was more deadly than open warfare. Douglas saw clearly enough that the sermons were dull and he spent evening after evening sounding Fowler's mind to its depths in the endeavor to find some angle in it that would tempt Lost Chief into the chapel.

It was a good mind, that of this preacher, stored with a very fair amount of classical learning and packed with stories of western adventure. But classical lore had no appeal for modern-minded Lost Chief and Mr. Fowler's adventure could be surpassed by any man in the Valley.

Judith treated the sermons with open scorn. "No, indeed; I won't come up to the chapel," she replied to

Doug's appeal. "Why should I suffer when I don't have to? If it would help you—! But it wouldn't! The sooner you learn what a fool the old sky pilot is, the better. Or, I tell you, Douglas! You preach the next sermon and I promise to come and bring the crowd."

Douglas grinned feebly. "I value my life," he answered.

Mary Spencer, who was listening to the conversation which took place in her kitchen, now made a suggestion.

"Why don't you feed 'em, Doug? Announce a series of fifty-cent dinners up at the chapel and while the folks eat, let Mr. Fowler preach."

Douglas laughed delightedly. "That's a 'gregus' idea! I'll do it. I'll begin this Sunday with a venison dinner!"

Mary nodded. "You get the food together and there are three or four of us women who would be glad to cook it for you."

"You are a real friend, Mother!" exclaimed Douglas. "I believe you've solved my problem!"

And so, in spite of Mr. Fowler's protest, a venison dinner was announced for Sunday and received by the Valley in a spirit of hilarious enthusiasm. The preacher refused to deliver the sermon while the meal was in progress, but it was such a gustatory success that at its close, the guests sat in complete docility through a sermon on future punishment. It was a good sermon, quite as modern in most aspects as Lost Chief. Douglas had seen to that. Mr. Fowler had reached the closing sentence when a bull bellowed outside and the door opened disclosing Elijah Nelson, with his horse close behind him. The preacher paused.

"Excuse me!" exclaimed Nelson. "I thought this was just a dinner!"

He was a big man, perhaps fifty years of age, with

a smooth-shaven ruddy face. He wore a sheepskin vest over his corduroy coat, and one of the small boys bleated. Grandma Brown promptly smacked him on the mouth.

"Will you come in and eat?" asked Fowler.

"No, thank you," replied the Mormon; adding with a determined thrust of his lower jaw, "I want Scott Parsons to come out. I won't disturb the rest of you."

"What do you want of me?" demanded Scott from his place between Judith and Inez.

"Come outside and I'll tell you."

Scott grunted derisively. "It sure-gawd has got to be something more than that to win me out of this position. I'm the envy of Lost Chief, old sheep-man!"

There was a general laugh.

"Go on out and see what he wants, Scott," said Peter.

Scott sighed and detached himself. The congregation waited a moment; then curiosity had its own way and the chapel emptied itself into the yard. Several Mormons were sitting their horses before the line of quivering aspens that bound the little clearing. A big red bull was tied to the corral fence. Elijah Nelson remained on the doorstep.

"Well," he began, "since you are all out here, I'll say to all of you what I rode down here to say to Scott Parsons, he and anybody that may be helping him are hereby served notice that they've got to keep out of Mormon Valley. We are decent, God-fearing Americans, and we are not going to stand being robbed any more."

"How do you mean, being robbed?" asked Peter Knight.

"Well, I brought this along as a sample," replied Elijah. "Some five years or so ago, I had some cattle grazing on Lost Chief and somebody ran off a dozen head, this bull among the lot. Anybody that can't do

a better job of rebranding than this, ought to try another line of business."

There was an interested craning of necks toward the huge brand offered in evidence; then every one looked at Scott. Scott said nothing, and Elijah went on.

"That fellow Parsons patrolled Mormon Creek, that heads up at Lost Chief Springs, all summer. He built a brush dam and threw the water out of our creek into his own ditch, whenever he felt like it. I didn't want to start a fight going. That's not a Mormon's business. We are peaceful folks, homesteading the wilderness. It was a wet summer and we managed to get enough water out of White Horse Creek to take care of us. But right is right and wrong is wrong and we aren't going to stand that next summer. Last week, a coyote was fastened into my chicken run; and last night a mountain lion with a trap hanging to his leg got into my corral, where I had two foals, and he killed them before I could get out. The trap had Scott Parsons' name cut onto it. I don't know who is helping him, if any, but I'm here with my neighbors to serve notice that it's got to stop. I see you've got a preacher here now. I begin to have hopes you may become peaceable yet."

A sudden gust of laughter swept Lost Chief.

"Well, Scott," asked Peter, "what have you got to say?"

"Me?" asked Scott. "I'm not a preacher or a Mormon. I haven't got the gift of gab. Charleton is a good talker. Let him say something."

"All right, old trapper," said Charleton obligingly. He grinned at Inez and began:

> "Yet, ah, that Spring should vanish with the Rose,
> That Youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close,—"

Elijah Nelson interrupted. "Is this the way you are

going to answer a decent protest against injustice? Is this—"

"Wait now!" cried Grandma Brown. "Don't get all prodded up. Scott, you give this man a straight answer."

"Very well, Grandma; I'll do that little thing for you," drawled Scott. "Nelson, you and the rest of you Mormons and Jack-Mormons go plumb to hell, but leave my bull behind."

One of Nelson's neighbors rose in his stirrups and shook his fist at Scott. "You dogy-faced Gentile! I've got you marked! You are the one who ran our cattle off Lost Peak five years ago, and we know who helped you."

"Well, I think you Mormons had better get back to your plural wives!" cried John Spencer. "We've had about enough of this."

"Judith," said Douglas, "you take your mother and go home."

Judith turned bright eyes toward him. "Think I'm going to run away? No, sir!"

Elijah's neighbor laid his gun across his own arm. "Say that again, Spencer," he suggested, "unless you aren't willing to fight for your daughter!"

Mr. Fowler sprang up beside Nelson on the doorstep. "I beg of you all to disperse to your homes and don't desecrate the Sabbath by such a scene as this."

"O, don't talk like a fool, Fowler!" exclaimed Grandma Brown. At this moment her little grandson came roaring lustily up the trail. He was covered with muck and snow.

"Judith's bull has got away from us kids and he's headed this way!"

"What were you doing with him?" shrieked Grandma.

"We was going to bring him up here and put him

in the church like Scott paid us for. And he said—"

But what the child intended to divulge was not to be known, for there was a bellow from the thickest of blue spruce and Sioux, with various chains and ropes dangling from his neck and legs, charged into the clearing. There was a sudden wild scattering of human beings. Judith whistled shrilly, but Sioux had been goaded beyond her control.

"Let me get my rope!" she cried.

"Hold up!" shouted Charleton. "Something's going to happen!"

The Mormon's bull had broken his halter and had turned to meet the on-coming Sioux. Sioux's bloodshot eyes fell on the stranger, and instantly the battle was joined. Snow flew. The buck fence crashed. The bulls bellowed, locked horns, retreated, charged, slipped, fell, rose again with a rapidity only equalled by the ferocity of the attack.

"They'll kill each other if they aren't stopped!" cried Fowler. "Stop them, Douglas! O God, what a place! What a place!"

"What a fight, you mean!" laughed Charleton. "I put up ten dollars on Sioux."

"Take you!" said Scott.

"If Spencer's bull kills mine, he'll pay for it!" cried Nelson.

"If they work into the corral," shouted Douglas, "some of you help me put up the fence again and we'll have them!"

"Well, but don't stop the fight." Young Jeff gesticulated excitedly. "I'm going to put up ten on Sioux!"

"Take you!" said Scott.

Nelson's bull ripped Sioux's flank for six inches and blood spurted to the ground. Both the great heads were

undistinguishable masses of blood. Their hot breath hung frozen in the air. The western sun turned all the world beneath the aspens to crimson. The betting became more general and more hectic as the battle waxed more furious. The Mormons forgot their grievance for the moment and backed their bull freely.

Suddenly Sioux freed himself, retreated and charged with the full force of his two thousand pounds. He caught Nelson's bull on the fore shoulder. The visitor slid sideways, stumbled to his knees and rose, shaking the blood from his eyes. He gave a look at Sioux, who was preparing to charge again, and turning he fled along the trail toward Scott's ranch, uttering as he went the longdrawn and continuous bellow of the defeated bull.

Douglas, Judith, and John Spencer immediately roped Sioux. Scott spurred his horse across the trail and drew his gun. "Get back!" he said to two of the Mormons. "That's my bull!"

"No gun-play, Scott!" called Peter.

There was a sudden exodus of women and children down the home trail, but Judith continued talking soothingly to her bull.

Scott did not heed the postmaster. He went on, to the Mormons. "You blank-blanks have trimmed me out of my year's profits! I'm not going to lose the bull too!"

"Judith Spencer!" shouted Elijah Nelson, turning his horse toward Judith and her pet, "is that Scott Parsons' bull?"

There was sudden silence, broken only by the distant bellow of the retreating warrior. Judith sat very erect on Buster, her beaver cap on the back of her head, her wide gray eyes brilliant. She looked at Scott. His hard handsome face was expressionless. Douglas ran across

the yard and reached up to tap Elijah Nelson on the chest.

"Don't drag a woman into this, you bastard American, you! I was up there that summer running your cattle and I lost every one of them, if you want to know, and there was no woman helping me out, either. Now, what are you going to do about that?"

Nelson lifted his hand.

"Wait a minute!" drawled Charleton. "It sure-gawd is your bull, Nelson. Scott ran it up to Mountain City, rebranded it there, and brought it back here in the spring."

"Why, you traitor!" roared Scott. "You staged the whole play, and I'll bet you staged this with your traps."

"I never let a debt go unpaid," chuckled Charleton.

"Aw, come off, Scott!" cried John Spencer. "Give them the bull and send them home. We are sick of your rows in this valley!"

Scott forgot that he was guarding the trail. He spurred his horse furiously toward John, flourishing his six-shooter. The two Mormons slipped quickly away.

"If you think you can sacrifice me for Jude, John Spencer!" cried Scott. He got no farther, for Douglas, now on the Moose, cracked him on the right wrist with the butt of his own gun. At the same time, Peter knocked John's arm into the air. Scott's weapon dropped into the snow.

"Now," said Douglas with his quiet grin, "this venison dinner party of mine is announced as over. You Mormons take yourselves and your dogs off my place. Frank," to the sheriff, who had been an amused spectator up to this point, "come over here and soothe Scott. He's a right nervous cowman to-day. Dad, you take Jude home."

Frank rode slowly over to take Scott's bridle.

"Well," said Peter, "looks like our host wants to get rid of us. Come on, Charleton."

"I'll get you later, Charleton!" shouted Scott.

"But how about—" began Nelson.

Douglas turned in his saddle and faced the older man. His young eyes suddenly looked grim and hard. "Nelson, you have seen what Lost Chief is like to-day. We have no fear and we have no friends and we have no God. But Lost Chief is ours and we intend to keep it. No Mormon is welcome. Don't use our trails or our range or our herd waters. Now, go!"

"Those are hard words, such as a man can't afford to speak to a neighbor," said Elijah, turning his horse slowly.

Douglas did not reply, and not at all reluctantly the visitors spurred up the drifted trail.

"Come on, Judith!" John nodded to the girl.

"I'm going to stay and doctor Sioux up," she said.

"Go on home, Judith," urged Douglas.

"I'll take care of the bull for you," said old Johnny, who had not spoken a word during the entire episode.

"Nobody can touch him in the state he's in but me. You know that!" declared Judith.

"Judith," repeated Douglas, "you go home."

"Why?" demanded the girl.

"You know why, Judith. Go on with Dad."

Judith set her lips, and slowly, very slowly spurred Buster after John's horse. Not until she was out of earshot did Douglas say to Scott:

"Scott, let's you and me settle our differences once and for all." It was dark now and cold. "You gather up that gun, Johnny, and we'll go into the cabin where it's warm."

"I'll not go near your house!" Scott spoke gruffly.

"Look here, Scott! Don't be a grouch! Let's see if we can't get together."

"Get together? What for? Some of this pious stuff, I suppose!"

"No, it's not! It's just common sense. We both plan to spend our lives in this valley. Why fight all the time?"

"You can bet I do plan to spend my life in this valley. Neither you nor Charleton can run me out. Lost Chief is as much mine as it is yours. Don't you ever get it into that thick head of yours that you can be Big Chief here. I am going to have a finger in this pie myself."

"Aw, draw it mild, Scott!" protested the sheriff. "Nobody's afraid of your threats. Doug's advice is good. Come out of your grouch and join the crowd."

"Whose crowd? Doug's? I didn't know he had one except for idiots," sneered Scott.

"No," said Douglas cheerfully, "we don't want any idiots in our crowd. We want good friends and watchmen, hey, Johnny? Come on in, Scott. The going is pretty good."

Scott uttered an oath. Douglas, a straight, rather tense figure in the dusk, did not speak again for a long moment; then he said quietly, "All right, Scott! I'm through. Get off my place, quick!"

He dismounted and unsaddled the Moose. Scott rode off at a gallop.

"Want any help with the bull, Doug?" asked Frank Day.

"No, thanks! We'll get him into the stable and then look him over. Get the lantern, will you, Johnny?"

"Then I'll be riding," said the sheriff. "My chores

should have been done an hour ago," and he jingled down the trail.

It was not difficult to lead Sioux into the little log cow stable. But here all progress ceased. The bull became so frantic whenever they tried to examine his wounds that after a prolonged struggle they left him. Johnny and Douglas finished the chores while the preacher went into the cabin and got supper. They sat long over the meal. Old Johnny was deeply excited. A fight always upset his poor old tangled nerves. Douglas finally suggested that he take the lantern and clean up after the dinner; and the old man, who loved to potter about the chapel almost as much as did the preacher, acquiesced enthusiastically.

After he had gone, Fowler said, "Douglas, that little chap is going to do some one bodily harm if we aren't careful. He is getting fanatically devoted to you. I had to keep my hand on his arm all the afternoon."

"The poor old dogy!" Doug shook his head. "We'll keep the guns away from him, and then he won't get into trouble. I'm more bothered about you and Scott than I am about me and Johnny, though!"

"Scott means mischief," said the preacher.

Douglas nodded. "I don't want you to go anywhere without me. He is plenty smart enough to know that the best way to get me is through you—or Judith!"

"Don't worry about me, Douglas. I heard Bryan say once, 'My body is covered with the callouses of defeat. No one can hurt me.' I am like Bryan. No one can hurt me. And I would guess that Judith can look out for herself."

Douglas grunted. The two sat staring at the fire in a silence that was not broken until Judith called from without, "Douglas, I want to see Sioux!"

Douglas took up the lantern and, followed by Fowler, went out. Judith stood beside Buster.

"You give me the lantern, Doug, and neither of you follow me. I can manage him best alone." She was not gone long. "He's not as bad off as I feared," she said when she returned. "I'll let him feed and rest for another hour, then I'll take him down home where I can tend to him right."

"Then let's go in out of the cold," suggested Fowler.

When they were established around the stove, Judith asked, "How did you and Scott get along, Douglas?"

Douglas told her of the conversation. Judith looked serious.

"You see, Doug, Dad keeps Scott sore all the time about me. I don't think he'd be half so ugly to you if it were not for that."

"O yes, he would!" replied Douglas. "Scott and I were born to fight with each other, just like old Prince and Charleton's Nero. We can't help our backs bristling when we see each other."

"Inez could make Scott behave if she cared anything about it. Scott isn't in love with her, but she has a lot of influence over him, like she has over the other men in this valley." Judith watched her hunting-boots steam against the hearth.

"She has too much influence over you, Judith," said Mr. Fowler.

"She's my friend," returned Judith briefly.

"Your friend!" cried Fowler. "Your friend! Do you realize what you are saying?"

"Yes, I certainly do, and I don't want a lecture about it either." Judith sat erect.

Mr. Fowler leaned forward, his eyes glowing with indignation. "I've swallowed all I can swallow about

Inez Rodman. I allowed Douglas to bring her to the table and I ate with her though my gore rose in my throat. Because I felt that my only chance to win the confidence of Lost Chief was to countenance for a time that which cannot be countenanced. But I am through. How long do you think you can be a friend to Inez, Judith, and not become like her?"

Judith jumped to her feet. "O, I am so sick of this kind of thing!" she cried.

"Fowler is dead right and you know it, Judith," said Douglas.

"You don't dare to say these things to her face!" Judith's eyes were full of the tears of anger.

"I'd just as soon," Douglas grinned.

"I'm going to tell her what I think of her and what she is doing to the youth of Lost Chief," stated Mr. Fowler.

"She's not a bit worse for Lost Chief than Charleton Falkner," exclaimed Judith. "And you don't pick on him!"

"He couldn't be as bad as Inez," insisted the preacher. "There is nothing so bad for a community as her kind of a woman."

"That just isn't so, Mr. Fowler," protested Douglas. "Charleton is worse than Inez ever thought of being. All I'm complaining about is her influence on Judith."

"You both talk as if I had no mind of my own!" Judith said indignantly. "If you knew the temptations I'd withstood, you'd not be so free with your comments about me. And if all I'm going to get when I come up here is criticism, I'm not coming any more. Don't you follow me, Douglas!" and Judith, in her short khaki suit, swept out of the cabin with a grace and dignity that would have done credit to a velvet train.

The preacher was deeply perturbed. He rose and paced the floor. "Douglas, I've tried to play this thing your way. But now I am through compromising. There can be no compromise with God. I'm no longer going to keep silence when events like those this afternoon take place. Undoubtedly my stay in Lost Chief will be short. But while I'm here I am going to stand openly and vehemently for the ten commandments."

Douglas tilted his chair back, folded his arms on his chest, and dropped his chin. "Something's wrong with your religion," he said.

"Nothing is wrong with my religion," retorted the preacher. "But Lost Chief is more wrong than most places. It's a transplanted New England community, and people who come from Puritan stock can't get along without God. They are worse than any one else without Him."

"I'm sick of worrying about it!" cried Douglas irritably.

"Do you mean you are sick of the fight? That you are going to let Inez have Judith?"

Douglas straightened up. "No, by God! Not if I have to shoot Inez! You go ahead and preach your own way. I'll see that you are not hurt."

And this was his last word on the subject that night.

CHAPTER XV

THE FLAME IN THE VALLEY

"The coyote is a coward, so his bite is the nastiest."
—*Old Sister, the dog.*

THE next day when Douglas went down to the ranch to help out with a day's work for which John had asked him, Judith obviously avoided him. Douglas made no attempt to enforce a tête-à-tête until mid-afternoon. Then he followed Jude into the empty cow stable.

"Jude, I can't bear to have you think I'm not fair about Inez. If that's what you are sore about."

Judith laid carefully back the eggs she had taken out of the manger. Her face was set when she turned to him. "It doesn't matter much, I suppose, whether you are fair to Inez or not. She can take care of herself. What I'm angry about is your being so stupid with me, always picking at me about the things that don't count and so wrapped up in your own ideas that you can't see what I really need, and why I am so terribly restless."

Douglas leaned against the door-post, his face eager, his breath a little quickened. Now, at last, perhaps he was to win past the threshold and gaze upon Judith's inner solitude. But he would not crowd her.

"What is it that makes you so restless, Judith?" he asked gently.

"Well, it certainly isn't lack of religion and it certainly isn't lack of marrying," she retorted. "Those are the

only suggestions you've ever been able to make about my state of mind."

"But, you see," Doug's voice was still gentle, "I don't even know what your state of mind is! Sometimes you tell me you find life a bitter disappointment. Sometimes you find it very beautiful. Sometimes you want to spend all your days in Lost Chief. Sometimes you must sell your heart's blood to get away from it. All that I really know about your state of mind is that you are lonely and uneasy, like me."

Judith watched him with less perhaps of anger than of resentment in her deep gray eyes.

"It's the unfairness of it! The utter unfairness of life to women!" she burst out. "Don't you see?"

Douglas shook his head. "How can I see? You are very beautiful. You have the strength of a fine boy. You have a splendid mind. You have a very special gift in handling animals. You are gay and brave-hearted and lovable. Why in the world should I feel that life isn't fair to you?"

"Don't you see?" wringing her hands together. "I have all that, and no chance to use any of it so that it's put to any sort of big use at all. I'm buried alive!"

"Oh!" Douglas gasped. He had indeed seen Judith's trouble. All the vital beauty, the splendid talents—was marriage to him a big use of them? "Oh!" he repeated. He brushed his hand across his eyes. "God! Judith," he muttered, "what can I do?"

"I don't know," she said, "but at least you can stop trying to thrust old Fowler down my throat. As for Inez, I judge Inez a good deal more exactly than you do and in many ways more harshly. But what I do insist on is that no man in Lost Chief is fit to judge her."

Judith again picked up the eggs, and went out.

Douglas put in the rest of the week placing his traps up the canyon, and purposely avoided talking with Fowler about his next sermon. He was not surprised, however, when he read the announcement which the preacher gave him to tack up on the post-office door. The sermon was to deal with the modern Magdalene.

Fowler had chosen his subject with the idea of exciting popular interest: his choice was almost perfect. Every soul in Lost Chief was packed into the log chapel long before the services began—every soul, that is, but Inez. Mr. Fowler never had been more eloquent and never, probably, had preached to a more deeply interested congregation. His sermon was a vitriolic arraignment, thinly disguised by Biblical nomenclature, of Inez Rodman.

When Fowler had finished, Young Jeff rose slowly to his feet. Douglas, from his usual place in a rear seat, smiled a little. He liked Young Jeff and liked him best when he rose as now, to do battle for a friend.

"Fowler," said Young Jeff, "I don't like that sermon. We all know who you are driving at, and as for me, you make me very sore. That's a Lost Chief girl and no outsider can come in here and insult her."

"Right! Right!" called several men.

"I didn't expect you to like the sermon," said Mr. Fowler. "I'm through saying pleasant things to you folks. You are going to get straight facts from now on."

"That's as it may be. But you keep your tongue off of Lost Chief women."

"I don't know why you get your back up, Young Jeff!" cried Grandma Brown. "The people of Lost Chief aren't ignorant. They do what they do because they prefer it that way. They know what the world calls

their doings. Why be squeamish when Fowler comes in here and just repeats the world's attitude on such doings? Inez is the ruination of our young folks, and we all know it."

"That's right!" called Mrs. Falkner; and Mary Spencer added a low, "Yes! Yes!"

"She's better than any man in the room, right now!" cried Judith. "If you are going to drive her out, you ought to drive the men out."

"Fine!" called Charleton Falkner.

There was a quick guffaw of laughter, during which John Spencer rose.

"Fowler, I don't want to seem to go against my own son, but I want to say that if you try any more sermons like this one, I'm going to head a committee to run you out of the Valley."

"I'd want to be head of that committee myself. Don't be a hog, John!" drawled Charleton.

"That's a good idea!" exclaimed Scott Parsons. "If the preacher says, 'Drive Inez out,' we'll say, 'Out with the preacher!' "

"You're all talking like a parcel of children!" said Grandma Brown.

"Come on!" shouted Scott. "The Pass is open. Let's send him out now!"

Douglas slid to the end of the seat. Fowler stood tensely behind the table, pale, but calm. Peter Knight spoke for the first time.

"I've got an idea. Let's give the sky pilot just one more chance. Let's ask him to preach a sermon next Sunday that we can all feel the right kind of an interest in, or else resign, himself."

Douglas spoke suddenly, "Just what would that kind of a sermon be about, Peter?"

"Well, that's Fowler's job," replied Peter. "He's been at it all his life. He's probably learned by this time the kind of sermons people don't like. I don't want to see him driven out of Lost Chief. I want him to have his chance."

"That's fair enough," exclaimed Charleton. "This isn't such bad fun. Why drive him out while the fun lasts? How about it, John?"

"Fair enough!" agreed John.

"Nothing doing!" cried Scott.

"Now, Scott," warned Charleton amiably, "you run the bull business and you'll have your hands full. We old regulars will handle the preacher."

"Huh!" sniffed Grandma Brown. "Wonderful! 'Old regulars!' Well, don't any of you old regulars forget that Douglas Spencer has grown up and that his brand mark is the same as his grandfather's. I think you all are acting like a parcel of children!"

Nobody spoke for a moment. Douglas watched Mr. Fowler anxiously, but the old preacher appeared to have no weapons with which to meet the occasion. Douglas felt that the situation was getting out of hand. He knew how to meet physical resistance, but he realized that he was only a novice in the sort of strategy that controls by mental superiority alone. He ground his teeth together.

"I'm young yet and I'll learn! See if I don't!" Then he pressed his lips together and waited.

Peter broke the silence.

"How about it, Fowler?"

"I'll agree to nothing. I am through compromising." The old man's eyes were blazing in a white face.

"You're foolish!" exclaimed the postmaster. "But we insist on giving you one more chance. Let's see

what you can do for us next Sunday. I move we adjourn." And the meeting broke up with a considerable amount of laughter.

There was very little discussion of the situation in the cabin, that night. Mr. Fowler seemed inexpressibly tired and broken, and Douglas, with a sudden welling of pity to his throat, persuaded him to go to bed. Nor did he, later, interfere with the old preacher's choice of a sermon. There was a deep conviction growing within Douglas that the religious issue of the situation was entirely beyond his own directing.

Peter, however, had no such conviction and he took considerable pains to try to get Fowler to go back to the subject of immortality. But the old man had the bit in his teeth and there was no holding him. The post-office door on Saturday bore the announcement that Sunday's sermon would be on The Sins of Lost Chief. Just below the preacher's placard was an invitation from Jimmy Day for Lost Chief to attend his birthday dance on Saturday evening.

Douglas told of the invitation at the supper table. Mr. Fowler made no comment, but old Johnny said, "I suppose Scott will be taking Judith."

"I don't see why!" exclaimed Douglas suddenly.

"You're all rejus like in the church now. You ain't got the time for womaning. Are you still fond of Jude?" peering at Douglas anxiously.

"I guess you know how I feel about Judith, Johnny," said Doug in a low voice.

"Like I used to feel about her mother?" The old man put a hand on Doug's arm.

Douglas nodded.

"And would it break your heart if Scott or any other man got her?"

Douglas nodded again, then rose. "I think I'll run down to see her a minute. I won't be gone long."

Mr. Fowler smiled. "Good luck to you, boy!"

"Keep your fingers crossed for me," said Doug, slamming out of the door.

Judith kept her finger in "Vanity Fair." "We were all going in a crowd," she said. "You've been cutting us a good deal lately. Why not come in out of the wet and be just one of us?"

"I want to take you, myself," insisted Douglas in a low voice. They were standing in the kitchen, with the door into the living-room closed. "I want you to wear that white dress with the thing-ma-jiggers on the waist and your hair all loose around your face. And I'm going to make love to you every minute."

His eyes were entirely earnest. Judith smiled, then drew a sudden short breath. The color deepened in her cheeks, then retreated.

"All right, Douglas! I'll go with you!" she said.

Douglas looked at her as if he scarcely believed the evidence of his ears. Then he flushed. "Thank you, Judith," he said. "Good-night!" and he bolted into the night.

On Saturday evening, old Johnny was restless. "I have a feeling like I ought to sleep in the chapel," he said.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Douglas, who was knotting a wonderful new blue neckerchief around his throat. "Everybody will be at the party. You two keep each other company and have the coffee-pot going for me when I get home."

"Charleton ain't going to be at the party," said Johnny. "I heard Jimmy Day deponing at the post-office to-day that Charleton was still off on a trip."

Douglas hesitated and looked at Mr. Fowler. "Go along, Douglas," said the preacher. "We'll bolt the door and no one is going to bother us two old men. You can't sit over me like a mother hen all the time, you know."

"All right," agreed Douglas. "I suppose I do act like an old woman. I'll be home a little after midnight."

The dance was in full swing by the time Douglas and Judith reached the hall, with all the Lost Chief familiars present except Charleton. Inez came with Scott. The vague feeling of uneasiness that Johnny's report had given him did not leave Douglas, not even when he swung into his first dance with Judith. She looked into his eyes mischievously.

"This is nice, Doug, but is it what you call making love?"

Douglas laughed. "Give me time to find words, Jude!" His arm tightened around her, but his face settled with worried lines.

"What's the matter, Douglas?" asked Judith.

"I don't know. I just have the feeling that something is going wrong."

"It would be a foolish feeling if Charleton were here," said Judith. "But ever since poor old Prince—you know—I've had the feeling that Charleton was just waiting for a chance to hurt you."

"Has he said anything to you?" quickly.

"Of course not! Charleton is clever. Well, don't let it spoil your evening, Douglas. You knew you were courting trouble when you took the preacher in."

"And I sure have found it!" exclaimed Douglas with sudden cheerfulness. "If they don't hurt my old sky pilot, I don't care. Come on, Jude, a little more pep, if you please!"

Judith chuckled. "Ah! perhaps this is your idea of love making!"

"You'll recognize it all right when I begin," said Douglas, skilfully steering Jude past his father, who had been visiting the pail in the corner and was swinging Inez in a wild fandango down the center of the room.

Douglas had not the least desire to dance with any one but Judith, and when she danced with other men he wandered uneasily around the room. About eleven o'clock he missed Scott. "Where's Scott gone?" he asked Jimmy.

"O he only stayed for the first dance! I guess he and Inez had a row."

Douglas scowled thoughtfully and wandered over to the phonograph, which Peter was manipulating.

"Where's Charleton, Peter?"

"He went out after a stray stallion he thinks has wandered up on Lost Chief."

Douglas gave Peter a startled glance. "Jimmy Day just said he'd gone into Mountain City."

Peter shrugged his shoulders. "All I know is what Charleton told me last Monday." He slid a new record into the machine.

"Wait a moment!" Douglas put his hand on the starting-lever. "Isn't that the telephone ringing downstairs?"

Peter listened; then nodded.

"I'll answer it!" exclaimed Douglas.

He dashed downstairs and jerked the receiver off the hook. "I want Doug! I gotta depone to Doug," came a breathless old voice over the wire.

"Yes, Johnny, here I am! Where are you?"

"At Mary's. They got the preacher, Doug!"

"Who? Be cool now, Johnny, and help me. Who did it?"

"Two men. They had things over their faces and they were loco and they never—never—" Johnny's voice trailed into an incoherent muttering.

Douglas jammed up the receiver and leaped back up the stairs. He spoke hurriedly to Peter. "They've got the preacher. I can't get sense out of Johnny. You take care of Jude."

He jerked on his mackinaw and darted for the door. Peter followed him into the cold starlight.

"Wait a moment, Doug. You'd better let me give a general alarm."

"Maybe they're all in on it!" Douglas paused with his hand on the pommel of his saddle. Then he gave a hoarse cry, pointing as he did so at Dead Line Peak. "Peter! There's a fire up there!"

He leaped into the saddle and drove the spurs home. The Moose broke into a gallop. A moment later there were shouts on the trail behind him.

"Keep going, old trapper! The birthday party is with you!" roared Jimmy Day.

Douglas did not reply. He saw the flames leap higher as he covered the miles. He felt rage mounting swiftly within him, rage that was akin to what he had felt over the shooting of old Prince, but a thousand times more poignant. But he handled the old Moose coolly. Up the ever-rising trail, between drifted fences, up and up, with the Moose groaning for breath, until the quivering aspens showed clear and black against the leaping flames.

He threw himself from his horse, conscious now of a confusion of voices behind him, of dogs barking, horses groaning and squealing, and coyotes shrieking excitedly

from the blue spruce thicket behind the corral. The cabin and the chapel were in full flame. Old Johnny limped up to Douglas. Douglas put a gentle hand on the quivering old shoulder.

"Johnny, when did they come?"

"Right soon."

"You mean after I had gone."

"Yes. They broke the window out. I knew it would happen. This is an awful gregus bad valley."

"Steady now, old boy! Did they hurt the sky pilot?"

"No. They tied him up and took him away. Then I rode down to telephone and they burned it."

"Who was it, Johnny?"

"I don't know but I depone it was Scott and Charleton. They never spoke but I depone it. Like it was Charleton and John tied me to the mule and that was how."

"Steady, Johnny! Which way did they go?"

"I don't know. I was riding down to Mary. I knew Mary—"

"Steady, Johnny." Douglas looked up at the circle of faces.

"Is there anybody friendly enough here, if they knew who did this, to tell me?"

There was no reply, and Peter said, "I don't think if it was Scott and Charleton working together, they'd confide in anybody!"

There was a murmur of assent. Douglas stood, the kind hand still on Johnny's shoulder, drawing long shuddering breaths.

"If they hurt my old sky pilot," he said, "God pity 'em, for I sha'n't. Are any of you folks going to help me organize a hunt for him?"

"How do you know the two old fools didn't set fire to it themselves?" demanded John thickly. "The sky

pilot was in bad and that would be a good way out."

Douglas swung himself up on the Moose. In the vivid light his lips were twisted contemptuously.

"Glad to help you out personally any way, Doug!" exclaimed Jimmy Day. "But you'd better let the sky pilot go. They ain't going to hurt him. You've been the church buildingest damn fool in the Rockies."

"Speak for yourself, Jimmy!" cried Peter. "I'm with you, Doug."

"And so am I!" exclaimed Judith. "This is the rottenest trick ever sprung in Lost Chief!"

"You will not stir a step after the preacher, miss!" roared John.

Douglas stood in the stirrups facing his old friends and neighbors. But words failed him. He spurred the Moose out onto the trail.

Peter urged his horse up beside the Moose. "Where are you heading for, Doug? You mustn't go off half-cocked."

"I'm going down to Inez' place and see if I can sweat the truth out of her."

"It's a slim chance!"

"I don't think so! It's too dark to follow tracks now, and you can bet they've covered themselves well, anyhow. I have a feeling that Inez knows. She must have been willing to murder the sky pilot after his sermon. If we don't get anything out of her by dawn, we'll get Frank Day and start. I know I can count on him."

"Well, perhaps you're right. Inez has been venomous about this and I can't say that I blame her. Easy now, Doug. The Moose is about all in."

Douglas grunted and the way to Inez' house was covered in silence. Douglas had no sense of confusion, nor of defeat. He was angry, but with his anger was

a lust for battle and an exultation in the opportunity for it that smacked almost of joy. I'll get him back, he told himself, and I'll rebuild the chapel and I'll punish Charleton and Scott. Maybe I am nothing but a rancher a thousand miles from anywhere but no old crusader ever fought for the grail harder than I'm going to fight for my little old sky pilot. And if they hurt him—! Old Moose groaned as Douglas involuntarily thrust the spurs home.

There was a light in the kitchen of the Rodman ranch house. Douglas banged on the door, and when Inez called, he strode in, followed by Peter. Inez was sitting before the stove, on which a coffee-pot simmered. Scott Parsons stood beside the fire, coffee-cup in hand. Douglas helped himself to a chair and Peter imitated him.

"You folks didn't come up to my fire," said Doug.

Inez, who had followed his movements intently, smiled sardonically. "Did you expect either of us?"

"Not exactly. I didn't expect to see Scott here, either. It was rumored that you'd had a quarrel and that was why you left the party early."

Inez shrugged her shoulders. "Where's Judith?"

"She's probably helping old Johnny up at my place. There didn't seem to be anybody else likely to stay, after the fireworks."

"And what are you and Peter doing down here at a time like this?" asked Inez, looking at the postmaster as she spoke.

"I was going to get you to tell me what Scott and Charleton had told you about this partnership affair of theirs. But as long as Scott is here, I'll just sweat it out of him."

Scott laughed.

"What makes you think I know anything about it?"

"You have cause to hate the preacher more than any one," replied Douglas simply.

Inez' chin came up proudly. "I'm glad you realize that!" she exclaimed.

"But it's not exactly evidence," said Scott suddenly, "that Charleton and I had anything to do with the affair."

"No, nor, if they did put over the job, that I knew about it," added Inez.

"Which job do you refer to?" asked Peter.

"Running the preacher," replied Inez.

"But how did you happen to know he had been run?" Peter's eyes were half shut. "You came home early and didn't go up to the fire."

Inez bit her lip. Peter smiled grimly, his long, sallow face wearier than ever in the lamplight. "You aren't the kind to get away with a plot, Inez. Leave that to Charleton."

"No reason why some one couldn't have telephoned, is there?" demanded Scott.

"No reason at all," replied Peter, "except that Inez' phone has been out of order for a week and I promised to come up to-morrow and fix it for her."

"I didn't think," said Douglas, "that you were the kind to get mixed up in a rough deal like this, Inez. I'll admit that Fowler's sermon was raw and all that, but still you are no hand to blink facts. Didn't you have it coming to you?"

Inez' lip twitched. She looked from one man to the other, finally focussing on Peter.

"Did I?" she asked.

"Yes, you did," he answered. "You've got to lay the blame finally on the women. Otherwise civilization would cease."

"Oh, forget it!" growled Scott. "What are you

dragging Inez in on this for? She's always been a good friend to you, Peter."

"I like Inez," said Peter slowly, "but no one is a good friend of mine who is bucking against Douglas in this stunt he's at himself. Douglas is easily the coming man of this valley and if I'm not mistaken, of this State, and I'm back of him, boots, spurs and saddle."

Douglas flushed and twisted uneasily in his chair.

Scott sneered, inaudibly. Inez stared at Douglas, nostrils quivering slightly. "I've always admired Doug," she spoke coolly, "but it wasn't playing the game for him to let the preacher attack me and I'll never forgive him for it."

"I'll never ask you to!" exclaimed Douglas cheerfully. "And I'm not going to start a debate with you. I know that Charleton and Scott put over this deal and that you knew about it."

"I'm going to make just one statement." Inez was looking again at Peter. "I think whoever set fire to your place, Douglas, was a fool and a crook."

Scott buttoned up his mackinaw. "Well, I'll be riding. I'm a long way from home."

Douglas stretched his right arm along the table. His six-shooter was in his hand. "Don't hurry away, old-timer! I want to talk to you."

Scott stood rigidly, a forefinger in a buttonhole. "Don't get funny, Doug. This ain't a sheep-herder's war."

"No, it's more serious than that," agreed Douglas. "You don't get the idea, Scott. You can't run the preacher out of the Valley, because I shall keep bringing him back. You can't burn down my chapel, because I shall keep building it up. Now, you tell me what you

know about this man, because I don't calculate to let you eat, drink, or sleep until you do tell."

"You must think I'm a tenderfoot! Inez, you open that door into the yard."

"Peter, you engage Inez' attention, will you?" asked Douglas in his gentle voice. "Now then, Scott, where is Fowler?"

Peter moved his chair over beside Inez. Scott made a wry face.

"I ain't his herder. That's your job. But you've sure lost him on the range, Doug. A religious round-up ain't what you thought it was, huh?"

"Just keep both hands in the buttonholes. That's right, Scott. Now when you get ready to tell daddy all your little sins, speak right up."

"Look here, Doug, don't you start any shooting in my house. I never have had any trouble here and I'm not going to begin now. You'll never get anything out of Scott, this way. You let him go."

Peter took Inez' hand. "My dear girl, you'd better keep out of this. Douglas is a right nervous rider, to-night."

Inez attempted to free her hand. Peter smiled. "You can't be my friend and Scott's too, you know."

"I don't want to be your friend!" panted Inez.

"Don't you?" asked Peter, looking at her through half-closed eyes. "Why not, Inez?"

Douglas, intrigued in spite of himself by this half-whispered conversation, glanced toward Inez. Instantly, Scott thrust the table against him and leaped toward the door. But Doug thrust out a spurred boot and the two young riders went down among the table legs. Inez twisted in Peter's grasp, but he pinioned both of her

hands and watched the struggle anxiously. Suddenly he saw Douglas drive his knee violently into Scott's groin. Scott groaned and went limp. Douglas got to his knees and tied Scott's hands together with his own neckerchief. Then he dragged Scott to a sitting position against the wall and again covered him with his gun Slowly the agony receded from Scott's face.

"Where's the preacher?" demanded Douglas.

Scott did not answer.

"I'm going to stay here till dawn," said Doug. "If you don't see fit to answer by then, you'll start on the hunt with me. Think it over."

Peter, both of Inez' wrists in one of his long, powerful hands, put fresh wood on the fire, then sat down again. Inez leaned against him, breathing unevenly. For a long time, no one spoke. Douglas, the sense of exultation still upon him, lighted cigarette after cigarette and waited patiently. How long a time went by he did not trouble himself to note, though he believed dawn could not be far distant.

The silence was broken by the galloping of a horse up to the door. A moment later, Mary Spencer burst into the kitchen. She was wind-blown and wild-eyed. Her coat was open. Her head was bare.

"Is Judith here?" she cried, without appearing to observe the peculiar postures of the inmates of the kitchen.

"No!" exclaimed Inez. "What's happened?"

Douglas looked at his mother with startled eyes. "I don't know!" cried Mary, bursting into tears.

Douglas tore down the roller-towel and tossed it to Peter.

"Tie up Scott's ankles. Inez won't bother!"

Inez, indeed, was giving no heed to the men. She

ran over to Mary. "For heaven's sake, what's happened?"

Mary wiped her eyes and fought to speak calmly. "Up at the fire she insisted that she was going out to help find the preacher. John had been drinking and he argued with her, and followed her down the trail. They quarrel so much I didn't think anything of it. I stayed a long while up at the fire with the others. Then I went home. I noticed when I turned old Beauty into the corral that it was empty, and I was surprised. I hadn't thought Judith would start out till daylight. I rushed into the house. The living-room table had been tipped over and the chairs pulled round. I telephoned everywhere, but nobody had seen her. And this 'phone wouldn't answer. Old Johnny came down and he rode toward the post-office and I came here."

Douglas started for the door.

"Where are you going?" asked Peter.

"After Judith!"

"What about Scott and the preacher?"

Douglas turned to face the others, his lips white, his eyes burning. "What do I care about them, when Judith is in question!"

"You go ahead, Doug!" cried Inez. "Don't wait for anything. Judith's been talking about running away for years, but she never planned to go off in the winter, I can tell you that."

"John had been drinking, you must remember," half-sobbed Mary. "He's always so ugly then."

Douglas rushed out of the door. Peter followed him. "I'm going up to the old ranch and see if I can pick up their trail. I need another horse. My corral is cleared out and Dad's is too. But I—O, Peter!" Douglas' voice broke.

"Keep your nerve up, Douglas. I've got a couple of horses in fair condition down at my place. We'll ride there after we look over things at your father's ranch."

They hardly had cleared the corral when Mary overtook them. She was still crying, but except for her sobs they rode in a heavy silence to the ranch house.

Old Johnny was gone. They found a curious note on the kitchen table. "Going after Jud for Douglas. J. B."

"She's started for Mountain City, I'm certain," said Mary. "She's been terribly uneasy ever since Doug left home, always saying a girl had no chance to make anything of herself here. It would be exactly like her to lose her temper and start off, hard pelt on that hundred-mile ride with no preparations at all."

"That's not what worries me," said Peter. "It's John when he's drunk."

"It's light enough to start!" exclaimed Douglas. "Mother, you give us some breakfast. Let's roll up some blankets and take some grub and get gone, Peter."

In little more than a half-hour they were on the trail. And all the exultation which had carried Douglas through the night had fled, leaving him with the sense of impending calamity that had spoiled the dance for him. And he knew now that it had been a well-founded prescience. A door had closed behind him, forever, and, with horror in his heart, he was facing a void. For something had gone wrong with Judith. And Judith was his life.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRAIL OVER THE PASS

> Some riders' spurs are the lightest when their hearts are the heaviest."
>
> —*The Moose.*

IT was a clear day, but in the increasing light, white clouds could be seen whirling from the crest of Lost Chief.

"Lost Chief is making snow, but we won't get it before evening," said Peter, as they dismounted at the post-office corral. "Now we'll just outfit for a couple of days. I'm believing we'll overtake one or both before night, but you can't tell. If Jude was crazy enough to run away in zero weather, she's crazy enough to have taken any kind of a risk and to be paying for it."

Douglas went swiftly and silently to work. The sun was just pushing over the Indian Range when, each leading a pack-horse, they crossed Lost Chief Creek and started up the long climb to the Pass. Here the wind was rising and dry snow sifted constantly across the trail, obliterating any trace of hoofs that might have been there. It was slow going, too, for there had been much snow on the Pass and the drifts were frequent and deep. Douglas was extremely sparing of his mount. Nothing that he could do should interfere with his efficiency in the search, and although his mad desire bade him rowell the straining brute, he rode light of heel, resting at frequent enough intervals to satisfy even Peter's large ideas of what was owing to a horse.

It was not until they were half-way to the summit, pushing between towering jade green walls, where the wind was excluded, that Douglas suddenly pulled up. The snow was level and hard-packed. There were hoof and wheel marks, leading south. Friday's mail stage. A number of hoof marks leading north. The two men dismounted and for many minutes studied these.

"Here!" exclaimed Peter at last. "Four horses in a walk, up to this point. Here, they break into a trot; and this is old Johnny on Jingo, and that is the Wolf Cub.

"Easy, Doug! Don't kill the horses. It's only a guess you are following."

Douglas grunted impatiently and set his horse, Justus, to the trot. At the summit, still following trail, they pulled up to breathe the horses, then plunged downward. Half through the afternoon they followed the hoof marks. The biting wind rose and the sun warmed their backs as they crested the ridges. The wind fell and the sun darkened as they dropped into the valleys. Eagles on the hunt hung watchfully in the sky. Coyotes now and again sneaked across the trail before them. The two men threshed their arms across their chests or dropped their aching feet from the stirrups, and still the hoof marks of five horses led on before them.

Their shadows had grown long and blue-black on the trail before them when suddenly Douglas pulled Justus up, and Peter pushed up beside him. About a quarter of a mile farther on lay the half-way house. They were crossing a broad, flat valley into which the trail dipped lazily. Just before them, the tracks of two horses and a dog led sharply to the left and disappeared. Some one had fallen. There was a confusion of tracks, then a two-horse trail led on toward the half-way house.

Without a word, they put their horses to a gallop that did not ease until they pulled in at the little log corral of the half-way house. There were two horses, John's and old Johnny's, in the shed.

Crumpled on the doorstep was old Johnny, Doug's shotgun across his knees, at first glance, sound asleep. It was bitter cold. Douglas and Peter pounded their numbed fingers, then examined the little old cowman. He was, indeed, asleep, but is was the sleep that knows no waking.

"I thought he knew better than this," said Douglas, pitifully.

"He hadn't any outside clothes on." Peter fingered the cotton jumper. "Had a sudden thought and went off as crazy as Jude. Let's lift him into the house."

They opened the door. On the floor beside the stove lay John, his right leg bloody. They laid old Johnny carefully against the wall. Douglas stood rigidly staring at his father. Peter hurriedly lifted the wounded man's hands, then forced some whiskey down his throat.

"Start a fire, Doug!" he ordered.

Douglas did not stir. He stood, blue eyes haggard, cheeks frost-burned, staring at his father. John opened his eyes.

"Get my right boot off, for God's sake!" he said faintly.

"Wait!" said Douglas peremptorily, when Peter would have obeyed. "Give him some more whiskey so I can hear the story and be off. Those were Judith's tracks back there."

"The pain is killing me!" protested John.

"Where is Judith? Have you hurt her?" demanded Doug.

Peter applied his flask again to John's mouth. John drank, then groaned. "I was drunk. Awful drunk. If

Doug hadn't been so crazy about the preacher he'd have seen that. Jude went down to the house to get some warm things while she hunted for the preacher. I followed her. The house was warm and got me even more fuddled than I was. I don't know what I said but she came at me like a wild cat. Then she ran out of the house and me after her. I never touched her. I never saw such riding. I could just keep her in sight, and it wasn't till daylight that I came up to her in this valley. After I sobered up I kept yelling at her, trying to explain. But she didn't even turn her head. Then I rode my horse round in front of her and she turned that devilish little wild mare loose on me, kicking and biting my horse like a stallion. In the middle of the mix-up, that blank old fool of a Johnny gallops up, half-dressed and shooting in every direction. Jude she takes off up the valley and Johnny gave me this leg when I tried to follow. I got up here, him following me, and the fool wouldn't help me. Just sat guard outside the door. I kept telling him he'd freeze to death. He kept saying he was saving Jude for Douglas." John ended with another groan.

Douglas stood clenching and unclenching his gloved hands. Suddenly he turned on his heel. "Come on, Peter."

"We can't leave your father this way, Doug."

"Come on, I tell you!" Doug's low voice was as hard as his eyes.

"Wait!" cried Peter.

"Wait! Wait! While Judith freezes to death too!" exclaimed Douglas.

"She couldn't freeze to death. She's too mad!" groaned John.

"An hour won't make any difference," urged Peter. "I guess Jude had this thing planned out."

"Planned!" Douglas' blue eyes burned. "She's gone off her head with anger and disgust and she doesn't care where she goes as long as she's rid of him. I know Jude!"

"You don't know Jude!" contradicted Peter. "Help me to lift John to the bunk. He's got to be taken care of."

Douglas turned on his heel, took a quilt from the bunk and laid it over old Johnny, gray and silent against the wall. Then without a word, he lifted the door-latch.

"Don't forget that this is your father after all."

"But I have forgotten!" returned Douglas clearly.

"Stop that kind of talk," said Peter sharply, "and help me get his boot off!"

Douglas gave Peter a long stare of resentment; then, without a word, he rushed out of the cabin. He watered the horses, mounted Justus, and took the lead rope of his pack-animal, putting both horses to the gallop. When he reached the point where Judith had left the main trail he turned and followed her tracks, which were rapidly drifting over with snow.

The whole world was white. Lifting from the valley to the right, little hills rolled over into one another like foaming billows. Beyond these were distant ranges blue, white, and gold. Judith's trail led along the base of the little hills into a grove of Lebanon cedars, gnarled and wind-distorted. There was little snow among the trees and so for a while the trail was lost. But when the cedars opened out on a circular mesa where the snow was taking on the saffron tints of the evening sky, he picked it up again.

The mesa ended abruptly in a drifted mountain, opalescent pink from its foot to its cone-shaped head. The snow on the mesa was not deep, and Douglas realized

that Judith had followed an old trapper's trail that worked south toward Lost Chief Peak.

By the time Doug reached the foot of the mountain it was so dark that he barely could discern that Judith had circled to the right, around the base of the peak. There would be a moon a little later. Douglas dismounted in the shelter of a huge rock, cut down a small cedar, and made himself a fire and cooked some coffee. And he fed the horses.

He sat for an hour over the fire, waiting for the moon. He was not conscious of weariness. He was not thinking. It was as if there had been no burning of his ranch, no preacher, no old Johnny. His whole mind was focussed on finding Judith. On finding her and somehow ending the intolerable uncertainty and longing which he had endured for so many years.

The threatened snow thus far had held off. If the clear weather would hold for another twelve hours, he was sure that he could overtake her. He was impatient of delay and watched restlessly for the moon. Shortly after seven o'clock it sailed over the mountain, flooding the world with a light so intense and pure that the unbelievable colors of the daytime returned like prismatic ghosts.

Douglas mounted and slowly and carefully followed the trail around the mountain. He found the spot where Judith had made a fire. He paused over a drift where one of her horses had floundered. He urged his tired horses to a trot where Judith had followed a beaten coyote trail along a hidden brook. Hours of this, and then—a thickening cloud across the moon and a sudden thickening blast of snow in his face. He had been fearing this all day, yet the moon had risen so clearly that his fears had been lulled. He pushed on as long as he

could distinguish the trail. Then, with a groan, he pulled up beside a clump of bushes. The horses sighed gratefully. Justus' shoulders were quivering with fatigue.

Douglas unsaddled the horses and hobbled them; then he shoveled snow away from beneath some of the bushes and made a rough shelter over the open space with a blanket. He built a fire, crept under his rude canopy, and rolled himself in many blankets. He was very, very tired, and after a time he dropped miles deep into slumber.

It was gray dawn when he awoke and he was snug beneath a foot of snow that had blown over his bed-covering. He crawled out stiffly and made a fire. Then he fed the horses and ate his breakfast, examining the landscape as he did so.

Lost Chief Range rose to the left. To the right lay a broad mesa cut by impassable canyons. Far to the south and to the right lifted Black Devil Range, forming, with Lost Chief, a deep valley, the valley in which Elijah Nelson had settled. From Douglas' camp, the valley was almost inaccessible: almost, but not quite. Just under the crest of Black Devil Peak lay a pass. If this could be crossed one dropped southward into a cup-shaped valley called Johnson's Basin. Beyond the basin a lesser pass into sheep country, and thence still south to the railroad and the whole wide world.

Black Devil Pass was used in summer but only by seasoned hunters and cattle-men. In winter, it was closed by snow and ice. Yet now, Douglas was convinced that, unless big snows had stopped her, Judith was attempting that perilous passage. She was by now cooled down; she would not turn back. Pride, resentment, restlessness, and that virile love of adventure which only increased as she grew older, would urge her on and on. And to cross Black Devil Pass in winter was a feat which even Charle-

ton would refuse to undertake. Yet, he did not believe that Judith would attempt such a journey without carefully outfitting. And where could she have done this? Had she foreseen her flight and cached food and fodder? Douglas shrugged this suggestion aside as highly improbable. But she could have gone into Mormon Valley for supplies. It was possible to reach Black Devil Pass from the upper end of Mormon Valley, possible in summer at least. Possible also to reach the Pass by swinging around to the right of the Black Devil Range.

Douglas, with a grim tightening of his lips, looked over his supplies. Bacon, coffee, flour, matches; enough for a week if eked out by cottontails and porcupines. But the horses had only a day's fodder. He remade the pack, mounted and pushed on through the snows, which grew deeper as the elevation increased.

On either hand, the two ranges flung mountain beyond mountain, in shades of jade, creviced by deep blue snow. The tiny, weary cavalcade wound on and on with not a trace of Judith to lighten the way. It was noon when Douglas reached the forest which choked the end of Mormon Valley. He knew the spot. Nature first had covered the floor of the passage with boulders. Between the boulders, she had planted the pine-trees. The pine had grown thick and tall and had waxed old and fallen, and other pines had grown above the dead tree-trunks. In summer, if extreme care and patience were used, a horse could be led through this chaos. In winter, deep-blanketed with snow—!

Douglas drew up before the pines and dismounted. The snow was waist-deep. Very slowly, he began to pick a winding, intricate path between the trees. He fell many times but he finally emerged into the smoother floor of the valley. Then he turned and followed his

own trail back, kicking and pounding the snow to make better footing for the horses. He took Justus' reins and led him into the trail.

Horses hate the snow. These shied and balked, stood trembling and uncertain, shook their heads and kicked, and Justus nipped at Doug's shoulder with ugly, yellow teeth. But he pulled them on and by mid-afternoon they were in the open valley with snow not above the animals' knees. Gradually the Mormon buck fences appeared, and, just at dusk, a twinkling light.

Douglas rode up to the cabin and, dismounting, knocked at the door.

It was opened by Elijah Nelson, his big bulk silhouetted in the door-frame.

"Good-evening!" said Douglas.

"Good-evening!" returned the Mormon.

"Did Judith Spencer come through this way?"

Nelson shrugged his shoulders. "I don't care to hold converse with any one from Lost Chief."

Douglas moistened his wind-fevered lips. "I'm not trying to hold converse with you. My sister has run away from home. I've lost her trail and I'm scared about her. I won't stop a minute if you'll just answer my question."

A woman pushed up beside Elijah. "Who is it, Pa? For pity's sake, young man, come in! It's a fearful cold night and this open door is freezing the whole house."

Elijah stood back and Douglas strode into the kitchen. Several children were sitting around the supper table. Nelson repeated Douglas' query to his wife, adding, "He's the young man who brought the preacher into Lost Chief and who called me a bastard American."

The woman stared at Douglas. He was haggard and

unshaved. Nevertheless, standing, with his broad shoulders back, his blue eyes wide and steady yet full of a consuming anxiety, his youth was very appealing.

"Have you been out long?" she asked.

"Since Sunday dawn."

"She's your sister, you say?"

Douglas looked down at the woman. She could not have been much over thirty and her brown eyes were kindly. "She's only a foster sister," he replied, his low voice a little husky. "I— I— " he hesitated, then gave way for a moment. "If I'd stayed at home as her mother wanted me to, instead of bringing the preacher in, it never would have happened! Religion! Look what it's brought me and Judith!"

"Religion never brought anything but good to any one," said Elijah Nelson. "It's religion now that makes me allow you within my doors."

Douglas gave the Mormon a quick glance. Somewhere back of his anxiety it occurred to him that he would like to ask this man some of the questions that had troubled him for years. But now he said urgently to the woman, "If Judith was here, for God's sake, tell me! She must not try to cross Black Devil Pass."

The woman turned to Elijah. "Tell him, Pa!"

Elijah scratched his head, eying Douglas keenly the while. "Peter Knight told me something about you. You don't seem to have been tarred with the same brush as the rest of the Gentiles in Lost Chief. That isn't saying I excuse the way you talked to me up at your chapel, but I guess you're to be trusted as far as women are concerned. The girl came in here last night. She was pretty well tuckered but as mad as hops. She told me that Saturday night she had a violent quarrel with John Spencer and that she fled from home in a

burst of anger that was still on her when she got here. She's headed for the Pass and the railroad beyond and nothing that I know of can stop her. My wife and I did all we could to make her give up the idea but she was sure she could make it. And I almost believe she can! She's as strong as a young mountain lion: the way God intended women to be. She stayed here all night and got away about an hour before dawn. We outfitted her good. She thought maybe she could make through the Pass by to-night, but I doubt it. Snow is awful deep up on Black Devil. We've been looking for her back all day."

Douglas drew a long breath. "Thank you, Mr. Nelson!" he said, and started for the door.

"Wait! Wait!" cried Mrs. Nelson. "You must have some supper and you must rest. You look terrible!"

Douglas shook his head. "Every minute counts. I'm not tired, only terribly worried. I couldn't rest."

Nelson walked over to the door deliberately, and put a big hand on Doug's shoulder. "You fill yourself with some hot food, Spencer. You know better than to tackle this job empty. That girl is in a desperate frame of mind. You are going to have a struggle with her, if you do overtake her. You must be cool and save your mind and body. How did she come to be in such a state of mind?"

"She wasn't desperate," said Mrs. Nelson, unexpectedly. "She was sort of—of wild. I can't just find the word for it. But lots of young women are like that now-a-days."

Douglas looked at her curiously. Some phrase of Peter's, half forgotten, came back to him. "Revolt," he muttered. "Revolt, that's it."

The woman nodded. "Yes, revolt's the word."

Elijah shook Doug's shoulder. "How many horses have you?"

"Two."

"I'll feed 'em. Go sit down to that table and let my wife fix you up."

Douglas slowly pulled off his gloves, and his voice broke boyishly as he said, "You folks are awful kind."

"Yes, I've sometimes suspected that us Mormons was almost human beings," grunted Elijah as he pulled on his mackinaw.

Doug's cracked lips managed a shadow of his old whimsical smile. Mrs. Nelson heaped his plate and filled his cup with scalding coffee. Then she shooed the children to bed in the next room and, returning, looked down at Douglas half tenderly.

"She's a splendid big thing, that girl of yours. If I was a man I'd be plumb crazy about her. Has to be something fine in a girl to go crazy mad, just the way she was. It wasn't all about your father. It had heaped up for years. Though undoubtedly it was your father started her off this weather."

Elijah came in and sat down to his interrupted meal. "Good horses you've got," he said. "But you've worked them hard."

"Will you sell me some oats?" asked Douglas.

Elijah nodded. "I'll fix you up. Do you know how to get to the Pass?"

"No; I've never crossed, even in summer."

"Well, I can direct you, though I've never made it myself in winter. After you get over the Pass and into the Basin it will be easy going and you can get fodder there. A Mormon friend of mine is in the Basin this winter with sheep. I told Judith that and exactly how to get there."

"Was she in bad trim?" asked Douglas abruptly.

"No. A little used up for lack of sleep, that was all," replied Elijah.

Mrs. Nelson suddenly chuckled. "My, she was mad! It did me good to see her."

Her husband looked at her curiously. "How was that, Ma?"

"It's the way I've wanted to feel, lots of times," said Mrs. Nelson. "Go on with your directions, Pa. You wouldn't understand in a hundred years."

Elijah snorted, then went on. "There's no trail. But if you reach the summit, get a line on a bare patch in the middle of the basin, that's the lake, and the highest peak across the basin. It's got the mark of a big cross on it. You can't miss it. If you keep on this line, it will bring you out at Bowdin's sheep ranch. I don't know whether the snows are as bad on the other side of Black Devil as they are on this. Johnson's Basin drops down to about three thousand feet elevation and there's not enough snow in the basin itself to stop sheep grazing. But the climb down is something awful, even in summer. Ma, you put up a bundle of grub."

"I've got grub for a week, thanks!" exclaimed Douglas. Then he asked Elijah, hesitatingly, "Will you tell me why you are so kind to me?"

"As I said, it's my religion."

Douglas stared at his host's kindly face. "I'm dog sorry," he said, "for what I called you. But, how was I to know? I've been brought up to hate Mormons."

Elijah nodded. "I guess we're square. What kind of a man is Fowler?"

"I like him. But I don't know whether he's the man for the job I set him, or not. But he's going to stay,"

lips tightening. "I'll see to that! Have you always been a Mormon, Mr. Nelson?"

"Brought up in it. And I've brought my children up in it. Judith told us about the rotten trick they did you over in Lost Chief. What are you going to do about it?"

"Get them!" replied Douglas. "That is, after I find Judith. I think I know the men who did it, and the sooner they get out of our valley, the more comfortable they'll be and so will I."

"But where is that poor old man?" cried Nelson. "Have you looked for him?"

"I was trying to get a line on him from Scott Parsons when her mother brought word Judith was gone." Douglas paused and gave Elijah a straight look. "I wouldn't stop to look for any one on earth, if Judith needed me."

"Judith can take care of herself better than that old man," insisted Elijah.

"Nothing to it!" grunted Douglas. "He's been in the cow country forty years. Not but what I know it was a frightful thing to leave him. But it can't be helped."

"What shall you do about a church now?" asked Mr. Nelson.

"Build it again for the hounds to burn again! If I believed in a God I'd say he was off his job as far as I'm concerned."

"Humph!" exclaimed Elijah. "If I don't miss my guess, the Almighty is directing your business these days as he never has before. You are just about doing what He says and flattering yourself it's your own plan. God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform."

"I wish I could believe it," muttered Douglas, starting for the door.

"Now, I shifted saddle and pack for you to two horses

of mine!" said Elijah. "If you find that girl, bring her back here. I want to have some talk with you both. You can pay me rent for 'em, so don't waste your breath arguing."

"Well, whether you are a Sioux or a Mormon," exclaimed Douglas, "you sure are white!"

Elijah grinned broadly. "Well, that's a real concession for a Gentile! Be sure you stop here on the way out."

It was Douglas' turn to grin. "We'll sure be glad to head straight for here. But I'll warn you now. You can't make Mormons of us!"

"I'm not a-going to try. But I want to say a few things to you. No harm in that, is there?"

"None at all!" Douglas shook hands with his host, then turned to Mrs. Nelson. "I'm sure obliged to you," he said.

"That's nothing. But look, Mr. Spencer, don't you be too sure you're going to bring that girl back with you, even if you overtake her."

Douglas nodded. "I know," he agreed huskily, "I've got my work cut out for me." Then he went out into the starlight.

Elijah followed. "The moon will be up by the time you need it. Follow trail up to the timber line. Skirt the timber line till you reach the first shoulder of Black Devil. After that, God help you! The horse you are on is named Tom. If you aren't back in five days, I'll go over to Lost Chief and get help to look for you."

"Thanks," said Douglas, and he rode away.

Warmed, refreshed, and with hope shadowing his anxiety, Douglas turned the horses southward. Tom horse was a big, broad-hoofed brute, hard-bitted and not at all enthusiastic about his prospective trip. But

he was a stronger animal than Justus and Douglas pushed him sharply through the snow.

The trail through the fields for three or four miles was easy to find in the starlight. The valley narrowed as it rose and finally Lost Chief and Black Devil thrust foot to foot in a narrow canyon. Douglas did not enter the canyon but twined upward to the right along the timber line that clothed the ankles of Black Devil. The moon had not yet risen when the timber disappeared at the foot of the first shoulder. Douglas pulled up the panting horses, turned back to the wind and rested for a few moments, then put Tom to the climb. The snow was without crust but it was knee-deep and Tom didn't like it. He floundered and snorted, but Douglas spurred him relentlessly and they crested the shoulder without pause. Here, however, Doug decided to wait for the moon.

He moved into the shelter of a rock heap, for the wind was huge, and, beating his arms across his chest, waited with what patience he could muster. Where was she now? Could even her splendid courage stand up against the eerie loneliness. If only he could see her now, returning defeated, though still defiant. But he knew that he would not meet her so. She would not give up while she had strength to pursue the adventure.

There was no view of the peak from this spot. Before him lifted a dark, shadowy wall, sloping interminably to the remote heavens. To the east, Lost Chief Range was silhouetted against a faint glow that told of the coming moon. To the west was a chaos of unfamiliar peaks. When the dusk of the mountain-slope before him turned to radiant silver, Douglas started the horses on and

spurred Tom relentlessly. And if he had known how to pray, he told himself, he would have asked the Almighty to give him strength for the tremendous venture which lay before him.

CHAPTER XVII

BLACK DEVIL PASS

> They can stand the curse of being women, but they're revolting against men's being stupid."
>
> —*The Mormon's Wife.*

DOUGLAS spurred Tom relentlessly until the snow was belly-deep and both animals began to fight obstinately to turn back. Douglas dismounted and fastened the horses to a scrub cedar. Then he wallowed forward afoot to break trail. The wind increased constantly with the elevation, but even higher than its eerie note sounded the wild call of a solitary coyote. Douglas heard the call but remotely. His mind was fastened on Judith fighting as he was fighting. He beat trail until his lungs protested, then he brought the horses forward, halted, and beat trail again. His nose was bleeding slightly when he at last won to the crest of the first shoulder.

This was blown clear of snow and he mounted and rode well up on the second shoulder before the horses again balked. Lost Chief Range now had dropped so that dimly beyond he could glimpse the Indian peaks. The strange peaks to the right were subsiding to be dwarfed by still other peaks against which the stars floated, pendulous and brilliant. And still Black Devil's top was invisible beyond the terraced ridge that opposed the little cavalcade.

When, after infinite effort, Douglas surmounted the

third shoulder, he paused, appalled by the loneliness and danger of the position. The ridge had narrowed until its top offered barely a foothold, with sides dropping to unthinkable depths. The snow had blown clear and the wind was almost insupportable. A cedar stood before them like a sentinal guarding the eternal loneliness beyond. Tom made for this as if it were his last hope. As the horses brought up in the shelter of the tree, Douglas gave a hoarse cry of relief and dismounted. Some charred sticks and the remains of a cottontail had not yet blown away. Douglas examined the traces of the hasty camp, then chuckled.

"Safe so far! Some girl, my Judith!"

Then his jaw stiffened and he set the horses to the last shoulder below the Pass. Groaning, trembling, bloody flanks heaving, fighting constantly to turn, Tom, when Douglas sought to force him through the drift that topped the shoulder, deliberately lay down. Douglas freed himself from the stirrups and jerked the horse to his feet.

"I wouldn't own an ornery, unwilling brute like you, for a ranch!" he panted. "Do you think I'm enjoying this, that we are a bunch of dudes on a summer outing? I'll get angry at you in a moment, fellow!"

The pack-horse had embraced the opportunity to fall asleep. Tom, violently affronted by Doug's tirade, did his not inconsiderable best to kick his mate. Then he snapped at Douglas, who promptly cuffed him on the nose. Tom reared, fell, and began to roll down the terrible slope. The pack-horse did not waken nor stir. Doug flung himself after Tom. Slipping, falling, rolling, he finally caught the reins, and though Tom dragged him fifty yards on downward, he at last braced his spurs against a boulder, the reins held and Tom brought up.

trembling and coughing. And now horse and man could only stand for a long time struggling for breath. When his numbing hands gave warning that his rest period must cease, Douglas, with the reins caught over his elbow, began a fight back to the crest of the ridge, a fight to which the previous portion of the trip had been as nothing. When they reached the led horse, still sleeping with his nose between his fore legs, there was no more fight left in Tom, and Douglas dropped into the snow to rest.

The moon was setting when he led his little train through the gigantic drift to the long slope which lifted to the Pass. There was no snow here. The slope, as far as Doug could discern in the failing light, was a glare of rough ice. Over this he dared not urge the horses until daylight. He looked at his watch. It was nearly five o'clock. He fastened the horses to the only cedar in sight, then stood in the wind debating with himself.

He was very much exhausted and the rare air and the intense cold were giving him no chance to recoup. This was no place to make camp. The tiny cedar offered neither shelter from the wind nor an adequate amount of fuel. And up here, in this hostile loneliness, his anxiety over Judith returned threefold. Strong as she was, clever as she was, she was as open to accidents as he. Supposing her horses had slipped on this ice and had gone over the black edge! Douglas dropped to his hands and knees and crept out upon the glassy surface. A hundred yards of this and he brought to pause before a giant boulder beside which grew several dwarf cedars. He drew his ax from its sheath and after long effort with his stiffened fingers, he got the green wood to burning. Dawn, about seven, found him napping against

the warm face of the rock. He brought the horses up to the camp, fed them and himself, and as the sun shot over the Indian Range, then prepared to lead the horses onward.

The crest of Black Devil now lifted immediately above him. Just below the crest, a ledge broad enough for a pack team led straight into the blue of the sky. To the right the dark wall of the crest. To the left a sheer drop where the canyon between Lost Chief Range and Black Devil yawned hideously. This ledge, this narrow, painful crossing, made the Pass.

Douglas drew his ax and prepared to roughen a trail over the ice for the horses. But to his unspeakable delight, he had not gone far when he discovered that another ax and other horses had gone over the ice before him. He was grinning cheerfully as he sheathed his ax and took Tom's reins in hand.

It was noon when he reached the Pass. Sheer red walls to the right, rising to the hovering top of Black Devil. Still the sickening canyon depths to the left. To the south, myriad peaks, a whole world of peaks, snow-covered, serene. Far, far below, a blurred green valley, with a tiny white spot in its center. Johnson's Basin. The slope south from the Pass was very steep and deep with snow, but Douglas saw Judith's trail zig-zagging to a low shoulder round which it disappeared.

He fed the horses, ate some biscuits and bacon, both frozen, and started downward. Shortly snow began to fall, but he had no difficulty in following trail until mid-afternoon. Then he paused on the low shoulder. There were scrub pines in which Judith had made a camp. The snow had thickened until Doug could see scarcely ten feet ahead. He was utterly weary and very cold. He knew that he ought to go into camp for the night but

he could not. He tied the horses beneath the trees, a grateful, windless haven to the poor brutes, and went slowly on to reconnoiter.

Judith's tracks continued abruptly down the slope. Douglas followed for a few feet, then stopped. A horse had fallen here and rolled down the steep left wall. He dropped to his knees and followed the wide, snow-packed trail. He had not far to go. From the snow drifted over a rock protruded a horse's hoof. Doug swept the body free of snow. It was old Buster, with his right fore leg broken and a bullet wound in his head. Hot tears scalded Doug's wind-tortured eyes. After a moment of search for further details of the catastrophe, he crawled up the wall again and, after a frantic hunt, found a blurred single horse trail leading on from the spot whence Buster had slipped. He went back for his own horses, mounted Tom and pushed on downward.

But he could not continue long. It was soon dusk and he dared not risk losing Judith's tracks. When he came upon the next cedar clump, clinging precariously to the mountainside, he dismounted. Under the shelter of the trees, he fastened the horses. He trampled the snow for his fire-place and chopped a night's supply of wood. After he had eaten a hot supper, he wrapped himself in his blankets and huddled over the fire, consumed by anxiety.

The wind rushed by the cedars without pause. The hard, dry pellets of snow rattled on the trees. The horses, their chins hung with icicles, stood with bowed heads, motionless.

All of Doug's life passed in review before his sleepless eyes. He could not recall when he had not been shaping

his days around Judith. Even when as children they had lived the snarling life of young pups, she had been the center of his universe. He wondered if love came to many men as it had come to him. He had not observed it in any other man in Lost Chief. Perhaps Peter had cared so. Perhaps in the outside world it was not infrequent. But whether it was a common sort of love or not, he could not picture himself without Judith in his life. If he should find her dead, farther down on this ghastly mountainside, he knew that the light and warmth within him would go out and that he never would finish the journey.

One by one he went over the steps of the past year that had culminated in this trip over Black Devil Pass. He realized that every step had been the result of his own years of mental conflict. Yet he could not see how he could have failed to take each step as he had taken it. His mind mysteriously refused to present an alternative. And, thinking thus, he was conscious of a sense of spiritual helplessness as if he were being borne on and on by forces quite beyond his control. And there came to him a sudden and shattering conviction that this terrible night of loneliness had been inevitable since the day of his birth. Call it Fate, he told himself, call it Destiny, call it what we might, something stronger than his own will had shaped his days toward this awful expedition. Awful, he thought, not from the physical aspect—he had endured as much in other ways—as from the quality of the events that had brought the expedition about. It was all wrong that Judith should have been in the state of mind that made it possible for her to put herself to such a wild flight. Revolt, the Mormon's wife had said it was. Revolt against what?

Surely against something stupendous, something that a man was powerless to help her to free herself from or to bear.

Ah, Judith! Judith! Judith all fire, all wistfulness, all strength and beauty! What was he, after all, to hope to claim her, or even having won her, how was he to keep her? How was he to keep within his ken that restless, soaring spirit? What could he give her that would satisfy, and hold her? For the first time in many years, Douglas could have wept; wept for very sadness that Judith should be so lonely and so wistful.

How long he sat shivering with his burning eyes on the fire, Douglas did not know. He was roused by a faint cry above the wind. At first he thought it was a coyote. But when it repeated, he started to his feet and concentrated in an agony of attention on the sound. Once more it came, longdrawn, troubled, the howl of a dog. Doug dropped the blankets and strode from the shelter of the trees to deliver a long coo-ee. The wind was against him. There was no response.

He hurriedly dragged his entire supply of firewood before the shelter and set it to blazing. Then he plunged on foot downward through the wind-swept, snow-driven darkness.

It was a terrible journey. He slipped and fell so often and so far that when the light behind him dwindled to a faint point, he dared continue no farther. Standing waist-deep in snow, he whistled and called. But the cyclone wind drove the sound back into his teeth. Sick at soul, he prepared to turn back. He beat his arms across his chest, stamped his feet, slipped, and once more rolled downward. He brought up with a crash in a cedar clump. A dog barked and threw himself against Doug with a snarl that changed at once to a whine of joy.

"Wolf Cub! Wolf Cub! Where is she?"

He grasped the dog's collar. It was very dark beneath the trees. Wolf Cub led him forward for a few feet. He stumbled over a soft, huddled form. He rolled to his knees and pulled a blanket aside. Judith!—her head pillowed on her knees.

"Judith! Judith!" No reply. Doug put the blanket over her again and, with hands like frozen clods, jerked out his sheath ax and with infinite difficulty lopped off a cedar bough and got a fire to going. Sifting snow pellets, and the little wild mare's beautiful anxious eyes and drifted forelock, then that form beneath the blanket. Douglas heaped the fire high, then hurled the blanket away.

"Judith! Judith! Judith!" Sobbing, he crouched beside her, gathered her in his arms, laid her cold face in his breast, tried to enwrap her body with his.

"Judith! Judith!"

Wolf Cub whined in eager circles. Douglas laid his cheek against her lips. A faint warmth. He shook her, frantically, and beat her hands with his. Then he rose and balanced her on her feet. She hung limply in his arms. He huddled her before the fire again and forced some whiskey down her throat. He manipulated her inert body until when he lifted her again onto her feet she was able to stand. Still half in his arms. Then he forced her to stumble back and forth beside the fire.

"Judith! Judith! Judith!"

"It's you, Doug!" weakly and with bewildered eyes.

"O Jude, how could you! How could you!"

"Poor Buster—dead!" muttered Judith.

"I know! I found him. You must keep going, Judith. Lean on me but keep going."

But circulation was returning to her strong young

body. Shortly she was able to stand alone and to ask Doug where he had come from.

"My camp is up the mountain a ways. Why didn't you have a fire?"

"Lost my pack when I lost Buster. Lost my match-safe when I fell with the little wild mare this afternoon."

"I'm going to take you back up to my camp, Judith."

"I don't think I can make it, Doug. It would have to be a foot climb."

"You must make it. There is nothing at all here to keep us both from freezing to death. We'll start now, while I can still see the fire I left up there."

"I can't, Doug! You bring your camp down here."

"This is no shelter at all. I'm in the big cedars above here. You've got to have some hot food right off. We will leave the little wild mare here until morning."

With Wolf Cub hanging to their heels, they started the upward climb. Judith gave to the last ounce of her depleted strength. They reached the still glowing ashes of Doug's fire on their hands and knees, and lay beside it till the warning chill brought Douglas to his feet. He chopped more wood, rekindled the fire in the center of the camp, and established Judith beside it on some blankets. Then he prepared some coffee and bacon for her. She ate ravenously. Douglas watched her with satisfaction radiating from every line of his snow-burned face.

"Are you warm now, Jude?" he asked her when she had begun on her second cup of coffee.

"Well, not exactly warm, but I sure am thawing!"

"As soon as you are warm, I'll let you sleep. That's right, let old Wolf Cub snuggle up against you. He's better than a hot-water bottle. Are you surprised to see me, Judith?"

She looked up at him through weary eyes that still held the old unquenchable fires in their depths.

"I didn't know. If you had gone off on a long hunt for the sky pilot, you wouldn't have heard yet that I was gone. Did you find him?"

"I never even got to look for him. I was down at Inez' trying to sweat some truth out of Scott when your mother came in with word you were gone. Peter and I started after you at once."

"Peter! Where is he?"

"Jude, let's keep our stories until morning. Things look different, then. And you are all in."

"So are you!"

"I'm not as bad off as you. Let me tuck you up, dear. When you've had a sleep, you can give me my turn."

Too done up to protest, Judith allowed Douglas to wrap her in blankets and, with the Wolf Cub snuggled against her back, she dropped into slumber. Douglas set himself to the task of keeping the fire going. The snow ceased at midnight and the cold grew more intense. Douglas chopped wood or walked up and down before the fire to fight off the snow stupor which constantly menaced him. When the lethargy was too heavy to be controlled by exercise alone, he stooped over Judith and, lifting the corner of the blanket which covered her face, he would gaze at her with such joy and thankfulness as he never before had experienced. Whatever the future might bring forth, he had her safe and warm for to-night. And he wished that he believed in a God that he might thank Him!

CHAPTER XVIII

ELIJAH NELSON'S RANCH

"Call it Fate, call it Destiny, something stronger than my own will is shaping my destiny."

—Douglas Spencer.

AT dawn Judith stirred, blinked at Douglas, and sat up, staring. Her eyes were bloodshot and deep sunk in her head, but her look was full of energy, nevertheless. Douglas was standing on the opposite side of the fire.

"Have you been up all night?" she demanded.

"Had to keep the fire," he mumbled, swaying as he spoke.

Judith crawled out of the blankets, took Doug by the arm, and pushed him down in the warm nest she had left. Then she covered him carefully.

"It's my turn now," she said.

He slept until noon. When he woke, Judith was making coffee, and the little wild mare was munching oats with the other horses. The Wolf Cub was gnawing on a bone, and the sun sifted brilliantly through the cedars. Douglas got to his feet stiffly and Judith looked up at him from her cooking with a smile.

"Nothing like having your breakfast served immediately on waking," said Douglas.

"Come and eat, Doug. We must be on our way." Judith poured a tin cup of coffee and offered Douglas a bacon sandwich as she spoke.

"You shouldn't have let me sleep so long. A couple of hours would have kept me going the rest of the day."

"You talk as foolish as old Johnny!" exclaimed Judith. "You were in almost as bad shape as I was, and two hours' sleep would have been a mere aggravation to me. Will you let me have enough grub to see me down to the Bowdins' ranch, Doug?"

"No, I won't," replied Douglas succinctly, bracing himself for battle as he spoke.

"Don't let's quarrel, Doug." Judith kept her eyes on the fire. "I haven't any intention of going back to Lost Chief. I've broken away and I shall stay away."

"I don't blame you for feeling that way, Jude, but surely you can see that this is no way to go."

Judith set her fine jaw firmly. Finally she said, "Where did you pick up my trail?"

"Where you left the stage road. Jude, did you know that old Johnny gave Dad a nasty one above the knee?"

"No! Old Johnny came to my rescue, but I didn't think he could hit a canyon wall. Good old Johnny! What became of him?"

Douglas moistened his lips. "He followed my father to the half-way house. Dad was all in. Couldn't even build himself a fire. Johnny wouldn't do a thing for him. He went outside and sat down on the doorstep with my shot-gun across his knees; every time Dad yelled at him he said he was saving Jude for Douglas. The last of the afternoon Peter and I came up and found old Johnny there."

"Good old Johnny!" said Judith again.

Douglas nodded, hesitated, then said. "He was asleep and we couldn't wake him up."

Judith's eyes suddenly filled with horror. "You couldn't wake him up? You mean—"

Again Douglas nodded. "He was gone, poor old Johnny. For you and me. I came on after you, alone."

Judith twisted her hands together. "But dead, Doug! And in such a simple way! O the poor little old chap! I can't forgive myself, Douglas!"

"It's the way he'd like to have gone. You are not to blame."

"O, yes, I am. I should have stopped and sent him home. But I was beside myself, Doug,—O, you don't know! you can't know!"

"You're not to blame yourself about Johnny, I tell you."

"Now I never do want to go back! You'll just have to grub-stake me, Doug. Please!"

Douglas pushed his hair back from his forehead. If only she would not plead with him! She never had done that. He did not believe that he could stand out against it.

"You mustn't think of going on alone, Jude," he said.

"Then you come as far as Bowdins' with me and get rested up for your trip back."

"I want you to come back with me," repeated Doug.

"No!" said Judith. "I'm never going back to Lost Chief!"

"Then come as far as the Mormon's. Get rested and get some clothes together and I'll take you out to Mountain City, and I'll loan you enough money to live on while you get a job, or I'll put you through college. Either you want. You've done a great stunt, Judith, crossing Black Devil in winter. But putting over a stunt isn't necessarily acting with judgment."

"How could I act with judgment, under the circumstances?" demanded Judith.

Douglas looked at her with passionate earnestness.

"Judith," he said, "you must believe that I'm not criticizing you. I'm just trying to help you do the wise thing."

"Why can't I go on across the Basin and get the A. B. railroad at Doty's?" asked Judith.

Douglas looked down the terrible mountainside. "We aren't equipped for it, Jude."

She drew a deep breath. "I don't want to go back where I have to breathe the same air he does."

"Judith, what did he do?" Doug's lips were stiff and his eyes contracted as if with pain.

"I didn't give him a chance to do anything. I don't want even to talk about it."

Douglas sat silent for a moment; then he said huskily, "I'm ashamed of him."

Suddenly Judith put her hands before her eyes and began to sob. Douglas groaned. He put his arms about her and presently she leaned against him and wept with complete abandonment. Finally she began to talk.

"He's always worried me, a little—but I wasn't really afraid of him. I don't want to think about him—or talk about him—to anybody. Up till Saturday night he was just one of the hard things that heckled me—I didn't have anybody to go to. If I went to you, you'd want to—marry me. And—Inez—Inez has gone back on all the ideas she got me to believe. She's gone—and fallen in love—with Peter! She—she told me not long ago that she was going to do everything she could to make him marry her.—Just as soon as something touched her selfish interests she went to pieces.—I want to get away from Lost Chief!"

Douglas patted her shoulder in silence. It was inexpressibly sweet to have her there.

"A girl has a brain, as well as a man," she went on.

"She doesn't want to be just a servant to a rough old rancher. She wants to live by her brain as well as he does. What's the use of a woman being fine if that's all her fineness comes to? You can say she hands it on to her children. But she don't. It's something she acquires and it's lost—in the scrubbing pail."

Douglas listened with the whole of his mind. Judith's sobs had ceased now, and she went on, slowly. "It's not that I'm against children. I'd love to have a half a dozen babies. But what I am against is giving all that is in me—the brain side of me, to something that demands only a small part of my brain. I want a life like a man's and a woman's too, that makes me give all, all. Surely I can find a place somewhere where I can give that."

Douglas drew an uncertain breath. The Mormon woman had known. A sense of his own inadequacy settled on him like a cloud.

"I know you think I'm a fool. Yet you have big dreams for yourself or you wouldn't have felt as you have about the preacher. One has to have an ideal to live by. I thought Inez had given me one and—" with a sob that shook her whole fine body—"I don't see how it can work out!"

"I suppose," said Douglas, in his gentle voice, "that folks have been trying out Inez' idea ever since love began, and the homely, every-day details of living make it impossible."

Judith drew a long breath and was silent.

"And so," said Douglas, "you are through with love and marriage. Yet no human being can be happy without both. Life is like that."

Judith sprang to her feet and Douglas rose with her.

She began to walk rapidly up and down before the fire. It was so evident that a tempest was raging within her that Douglas watched her with astonishment and dismay. The sunshine flickered gloriously through the cedar branches. Wolf Cub gave cry after a coyote. It might have been a moment or a lifetime to the young rider before Judith halted in front of him. Her tear-stained face was tense. Her wide eyes burned with a light he never before had seen in them.

"And if," she exclaimed, "I told you that I loved you; that for years I had fought off a love for you that was like a burning flame in my heart; if I told you that to me you are as beautiful as all the lovers in the world; but that I never, never would give myself to you in marriage, what would you say?"

Douglas' gloved hands clenched and unclenched, as he fought for self control. After a moment he managed to return, steadily, "I'd ask you why?"

The tensity of Judith's expression did not relax. "I've told you why. I cannot bear to think of killing love by marriage. And it always works so. Always. And yet, O Douglas, I love you, love you!"

Douglas threw back his head with a sudden breath, swept Judith into his arms and kissed her, kissed her with all the ardor of years of repression. Judith clung to him as if she could not let him go. And yet, when he lifted his face from hers, she said, none the less firmly because her voice was husky:

"But, Douglas, I won't marry you!"

Douglas lifted his chin. "Perhaps you won't, my dearest! I'm not going to let that thought spoil the big moment of my life."

He put his hands on her shoulders and looked at her, at the long brilliant face beneath the beaver cap, at the

fine steel slenderness of her, and then he said in his low-voiced way:

"O Judith! Judith! why didn't you tell me, long ago!"

"Because nothing would satisfy you but marriage," replied Judith, with a half sob.

Douglas smiled wistfully. "But I haven't changed! Why did you tell me now?"

"I didn't want to! I didn't mean to! But I couldn't help it. You saved my life, Doug! It ought to belong to you, but O, I can't give it to you! I must go on. I must find out what is the thing I'm meant to do. I must!"

Douglas turned from her troubled face to gaze at the mad descent that must be made before Johnson's Basin could be won. Then he put up his hand and turned her face to follow his glance.

"Judith, do you think that I can let you go down there? If it was impossible before, think how I feel about it now I know that you love me. Somehow we have got to compromise on this thing, my dearest."

Judith clung to him. "I don't want to leave you, Douglas. But I can't go back to Lost Chief. I can't!"

Douglas held her close and for a long moment there was no sound in the wide solitudes except the Wolf Cub's faint hunting-cry.

At last Douglas said slowly, "If I give you my word that I'll take you out to Mountain City as soon as I can outfit, will you come back to Nelson's with me? Look at me, Jude!"

Judith lifted her eyes and searched Doug's face long and wistfully. Then she said, brokenly, "Yes, I'll come, if you will give me your promise. Not because I think

it's sensible but because, now I've given away this much, I don't want to be separated from you till—till I've unpacked my heart to you!"

"And after you've done that," asked Douglas, "do you think I can ever let you go?"

"But I thought you were not going to spoil this moment by arguing about marriage!" exclaimed Judith.

"I'll not!" cried Douglas. "Truly, I'll not."

The Wolf Cub trotted importantly into the camp with a scrawny jack-rabbit dragging against his shaggy gray breast. Douglas gave a quick look at the sky.

"Judith, either we must put this place into shape for a night camp or we must strike out at once so as to get over the Pass to-night."

"We'd better break camp," said Judith. "It's getting frightfully cold and there's mighty little fodder left."

They fell to work swiftly, and before the Wolf Cub had half finished his meal they were on the march. Douglas led on Tom, followed by his pack-horse. Judith followed on the little wild mare. The crest of Black Devil hung over their heads, the purple of his front crosshatched by myriad crevisses filled with peacock-blue snow. The same strange blue snow had obliterated their trail, and Tom, his bloody flanks deep in the drifts, leaped and slid and turned, leaving a wake, Judith said, like that of a drunken elephant.

The drifts had blown clear of the narrow ridge down which poor Buster had slid. They dared not trust the horses here, but dismounted and crept gingerly across, the animals slipping and snorting behind them. They rested after the crossing, and Douglas saw that tears were frozen on Judith's lashes.

"Judith, I believe the old horse was glad to go in service that way," he said.

Judith shook her head. "It's been a terribly expensive trip," she said. "Old Johnny and Buster."

"Expensive for them, yes,—poor old scouts both of them," Douglas sighed, then added, "But, God, what a marvelous trip for me!"

"And for me!" Judith nodded soberly.

They beat their hands across their breasts and remounted, silently.

All the brilliant afternoon, they worked their uneven way upward. Each of the horses was down again and again. Both Judith and Douglas were bruised and cut by ice. Both were drawing breath in rapid sobs when, just before sunset, they fought the last few yards to the level of the Pass, won to it, and lay on the icy ledge, exhausted. Wolf Cub nosed them and whined disconsolately.

"You're right—old hunter—!" gasped Douglas. "If we—don't—keep moving—the cold—will get us!"

Judith, who had been lying on her back staring at the sky, rolled over on her face and struggled to her hands and knees.

"Keep that—wild—elephant—you call—a horse in a long lead—or he'll step on you—Doug!" she called.

"Give me— a long—start, then!"

Douglas started forward on hands and knees. The little wild mare was as careful in following Judith as was the Wolf Cub. But Tom gave constant evidence of an earnest desire to walk on Douglas instead of the trail. He was too tired now, however, to be ugly, and the Pass was crossed without accident or incident.

It was dusk when they made the great rocks where

Douglas had camped before. Judith's strength was gone. She pulled the reins over the little wild mare's head and tried to pull her ax from its sheath. But her benumbed fingers refused to act.

"Keep moving, Jude!" urged Douglas. "Just till I can get a fire started. Don't stop walking for a moment!"

When at last a blaze was going before the rocks, Doug unrolled the blankets from the lead-horse and wrapped Judith in them. She crouched against the face of the rocks in silence while Douglas put the coffee-pot to boil and thawed out the bacon. It was not until she had swallowed a second cup of the steaming beverage that the snow stupor left her eyes.

Suddenly she smiled, and said, "It almost nipped us that time, Douglas!"

"And yet you thought you could make Bowdin's ranch alone!" grunted Douglas.

"It would have been getting warmer all the time. There would have been nothing like this!" shivering as a great blast of wind swept over the top of the rock heap.

"You risked death in every step," insisted Douglas. "It was like going down a canyon wall, not a mountainside. The drifts and ice made it impossible to tell how your next movement would end."

"Well," sighed Judith, "I don't think I'm regretting my decision. This might be worse," stretching out her mittened hands to the blaze.

"Nice, girlish kind of amusements you enjoy!" grunted Douglas, with a little grin. "Something quiet and restful about playing games with you, Jude! Now listen, my dearest, don't close your eyes until I tell you you may.

A night camp under Black Devil Pass is plain suicide, if you forget for a moment."

Judith threw off the blankets. "I'll chop some wood and get warmed up."

"Aren't you warm now?" asked Douglas.

"All but around the edges," replied Jude.

"Well, you put the blankets round yourself again and save your strength for to-morrow. You'll need it. It won't take me long to get things ready for the night."

Judith snuggled back in the blankets. "I'm really not a bit more done up than you are, but it's worth a trip over the Pass to see a Lost Chief rancher take such care of a girl. I didn't know you had it in you, Doug!"

Douglas laughed and began making the camp ready for the night. When he had finished his preparations, he sat down beside Judith, pulled a part of the blankets over his shoulders and drew her close against him. The Wolf Cub lay as close as he could crowd against Judith's other side, his nose almost in the embers.

Judith looked into Doug's face attentively. His eyes were heavy and deep sunk in his head.

"You are very, very tired, Douglas. Why don't you get some sleep?"

Douglas shook his head. "To-morrow, if all goes well, we'll reach Nelson's place. This is to be my one last night alone with you. I'm not going to sleep until I have to. This camp might seem sort of cold and up in the air to some people, but to me, it's pretty close to heaven!"

"I never can connect the man you've grown to be," mused Judith, "with the horrid boy you were once. I wonder what has changed you so?"

"Boys are rotten," agreed Douglas cheerfully. "Lov-

ing you is what has changed me most. Everything else came out of that."

"I suppose," Judith looked at the fire thoughtfully, "that if I'm going to work in an office, I'd better begin to polish up my manners."

"You'll be a wonder in an office!" said Douglas. "I can just see you coaxing and taming a typewriter same as you coaxed and tamed old Sioux. And just about as easy a job. You won't miss your horses and the Wolf Cub. You won't be homesick for the range. O no!"

"I've thought that all out, too," returned Judith coolly. "I'll hate every moment of it. But I'll be learning."

"Learning what, Judith?"

"About life!"

"About life! Judith, this is life. All of life. This!" He turned her face to his and kissed her lingeringly.

She was silent for a moment and there were tears in her eyes. Then she said, softly, "No, it's only a part of life. Things of the mind count heavily as you grow older. They count very much with you right now. What else is your fight for the sky pilot but a thing of the mind?"

"It's all based on my love for you, Judith," repeated Doug. "Judith, you never can stay away from Lost Chief."

"I'll stick it out. See if I don't! Will-power is the best thing I possess. Inez always said I'd never get up courage to leave. Perhaps I wouldn't have if I hadn't been so angry. But I did leave. She didn't know me."

"I wish Inez had run away. She's been your and my curse."

"How is she worse than Charleton?"

"She's more likable and a lot finer and so she has

more influence. You don't really think for a moment that Peter will marry her, do you?" Douglas spoke contemptuously.

"Well, if he doesn't marry her, it won't be because he considers that he's led a perfect life, I hope."

"That isn't the point. I think that men insist on marrying decent women because there's a race instinct that makes a man turn to something better than himself for his mate. It's what lifts the race, keeps the spiritual side of life moving uphill instead of down. If this wasn't true, human beings would never have got out of the monkey stage."

Judith looked at Doug with interest. "That might all be true, but I hope you don't put that up as an excuse for the double code."

"No. I don't. I'm just stating one of the selfish, brutal facts of life."

Judith made no reply, and for a long time Douglas made no attempt to break the silence. It was enough to be sitting under the brilliant heavens with Judith's wonderful body warm against his side. The far-drawn cry of the coyotes disturbing him now no more than it did the Wolf Cub listening but unheeding.

"I can't help thinking about old Johnny," said Judith at last. "It's going to worry me terribly when I'm by myself again. I should have stopped and taken care of him."

"It's not going to worry me," returned Douglas quietly. "The poor old fellow was unhappy and useless. He died a real hero's death for some one he loved. Folks in Lost Chief are going to remember that instead of his poor old feeble mind."

"I'm glad you were kind to him! You have been wise and kind in many ways, Doug, and you are only a boy. I believe Peter is right in saying you are going to be a big man."

"Shucks! Peter doesn't know that all the good there is in me is built on you."

"That isn't true," contradicted Judith. "You're big within yourself. Even Inez said that."

Douglas grunted and his voice was without enthusiasm as he said, "Inez can't see anything straight that is related to love. I'll admit she's dangerously interesting. If I hadn't always been caring for you, she might have got me twisted the same as she has you."

"I'm not twisted," protested Judith stoutly. "I'm just not afraid to see marriage as it is. Sordid!"

"Inez!" sniffed Douglas.

"Let's not begin that again!" exclaimed Judith. "Just love me, Douglas, and let me go away."

He drew her closer still. "Love you!" he repeated in his quiet voice. "You might as well tell me to breathe or my heart to keep on beating. I haven't done anything else since the day I drove the preacher out of the schoolhouse. Even when I've tried to stop caring, I couldn't do it!" with a whimsical smile. "Do you remember how I wouldn't let you go with Dad to feed the yearlings?"

"Yes, I remember because from that moment you were a little different from other Lost Chief men in my mind. Tell me some more."

Douglas stared at the fire, going in retrospect over the long, long fight, the fight that still was only half over.

"I can't put it into words that will make it seem as big to you as it is to me, Judith. Tell me, have you been lonely all your life?"

"Yes. Very, very lonely. With the feeling that there was no one to understand."

"That's the way it's been with me, only I always knew that if you could care for me we could understand each other. I want to make you know me to-night, Jude. I want to fix my real self so in your mind that wherever you go, you'll have me with you."

"You did that long ago, Douglas," said Judith softly.

"Have I?" wistfully. "You see, Jude, you are so mixed up in my mind with Grandfather's dream of Lost Chief, and mine, and the preacher, and God, that I don't know myself where one leaves off and another begins. And to-night, one part of me is on fire with happiness and another is frozen with discouragement. Are you sure you can care for me, Judith?"

"Ever since that night in the hay-loft when you kissed me, after your father shot Swift. I didn't want to love you. There didn't seem much romance about a boy you'd lived with all your life. I didn't want to marry. I wanted to give all there was in me to some one big and fine enough to appreciate it. And after all, it's only you."

"Only me!" ejaculated Douglas, comically.

Judith did not smile. "I fought and fought against it. But every year I saw you growing into a bigger, finer man than Lost Chief ever had known—a lonely sort of a man, not afraid to be laughed at even when it was about a matter of religion. I hated to see you making a fool of yourself, and yet I admired you for it. You grew so straight and self-controlled, and Doug,

you are so wonderful to look at! Your father never dreamed of being as handsome as you. He's just a great animal. But no one can look into your eyes and not see how you've fought to make a man of yourself. I love you, Douglas!"

They clung to each other in the firelight, heedless of the unthinkable loneliness that hemmed them in, of the ardors of the day, of the terror of to-morrow.

"Judith! Judith! I cannot let you go!" breathed Douglas.

"I must go!" Judith freed herself suddenly. "Nothing shall persuade me to go back to the commonness of marriage in Lost Chief."

"Marriage is exactly what you make it," declared Douglas. "I believe we can keep it beautiful."

"I'm afraid!" repeated Judith. "It's hard to do or be anything fine in Lost Chief. You know that. See what they did to you! Douglas, what are you going to do about their burning up your ranch?"

Judith felt his muscles stiffen. "I'm going to fix Scott and Charleton, once and for all," he replied.

"Shall you rebuild the chapel?"

"Yes—" Douglas made the affirmation then stopped, abruptly. Rebuild the chapel? And Judith not there? Put up the big fight for old Fowler, and Judith never returning to Lost Chief? Where now was all the zest for the fight? Why the chapel, why the ranch, why the big dream for the children who were to grow up properly in the Valley?

"No!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I shan't rebuild the chapel!"

"Fowler was the wrong man," Judith said. "You must realize that now. I wonder what they did with the

poor old chap. I don't want any harm to come to him even if he did make you a lot of trouble."

"It doesn't matter," muttered Doug. "It's all over for me if you are going away—" his voice broke and he shivered violently.

Judith looked into his face with quick anxiety. His lips were blue. "You go chop some wood!" she ordered. "And when you are warmed up, you creep into the blankets with Wolf Cub and sleep for four hours. I'll keep the fire up. You are so tired, Doug, that the cold will get you if you aren't careful."

Douglas rose stiffly, and wearily began an attack on another cedar. But he had not taken a dozen strokes when he began to sink slowly to the ground. Judith ran to him and helped him back to the blankets. Then she covered him snugly, and in a moment he was asleep.

It was midnight when she wakened Douglas. She was blue and shivering. "I'm a new man, Judith. Roll in quickly!" and he picked up the faithful ax.

It was long and biting cold till dawn. Douglas was too weary, too much menaced by the cold, to think coherently; for now, conscious of the depletion of his strength, even his new-found happiness could not blur the fact that he and Judith were playing with death on Black Devil Peak. He kept the fire going and fought the desire to sleep until, far below and to the east, the Indian Range turned black against a crimson sky. Then he awakened Judith. They made a hasty breakfast, then started the stiff and weary horses through the drifts toward Mormon Valley.

But Tom horse, facing homeward, needed none of the rowelling that he had demanded on the way up. The cold and wind were difficult to bear, for the two young

people were inexpressibly weary of brain as well as body. By noon they made the valley. It was a slow-moving little outfit that finally limped past Nelson's corral and was greeted by a shout from the cabin door.

Elijah, his wife, and children, rushed out to meet them and led them into the big bed-living-room off the kitchen.

"Well," said Mrs. Nelson, "I knew she'd have to come back with you!"

CHAPTER XIX

HOME

DOUGLAS was half blinded by snow-glare and wind, so it was several minutes before he observed an old man sitting eagerly erect on one of the beds. Doug started to his feet.

"Where'd you come from, Mr. Fowler!"

"From Lost Chief Peak. Get warm and rested, Doug, before you try to talk."

"I was starting out after you when I found that Judith—" began Doug. "And then—"

"Judith," interrupted Mr. Fowler, "needed you more than I did."

"Did they hurt you?" insisted Douglas.

"No. Don't try to talk till you are rested, my boy."

"That won't take long!" croaked Douglas.

But, as a matter of fact, it was morning before he heard the preacher's story or told his own. He was warmed and fed enormously and rolled into a feather bed. And he knew nothing more until the smell of coffee and the sound of women's voices roused him.

The living-room was flooded with sunlight. The preacher was thrusting wood into the red-hot stove.

"Where's Judith?" asked Douglas.

"Helping Mrs. Nelson get breakfast. How are you?"

"Fine! Do you suppose I can shave before breakfast?"

The preacher nodded toward a washstand in the corner and Douglas began to make his toilet. Mr. Fowler made no attempt to talk during this process but stood before the fire, watching the young man with somber, wistful eyes.

It was an exceedingly well-groomed young rider who appeared at Elijah's long breakfast table a half-hour later. Judith, snow-burned, but otherwise a very fit young person, gave him an appreciative look and smile, and left him to the others while she went on with her breakfast.

They sat long at the table. The children were sent off to school. The adventure up and down Black Devil Peak was thoroughly discussed. Then Douglas turned to the preacher.

"And what did they do to you, Mr. Fowler?"

The old man smiled grimly. "That won't take long to tell. Old Johnny and I went to sleep soon after you left, and the first thing I knew I was being gagged and blind-folded by a couple of fellows in masks. They carried me out to the corral and fastened me onto a horse. I didn't put up a fight, Doug. I'm too old. One of the men then led my horse off at a gallop. What became of the other man and Johnny, I can only surmise from what Mr. Nelson has told me."

"Who were the men?" demanded Douglas.

"I don't know. Of course, I suspect Charleton Falkner and Scott Parsons. I suppose it was Scott Parsons, though I couldn't prove it. I suppose he took me along the trail Nelson has kept open past the old Government corral to get to Scott's trail when he goes for his mail. Anyhow, he locked me into that old cabin, up in the Government corral. There was fuel and matches, so he didn't want me to freeze to death. I think he intended

to come back the next day and take me somewhere else before I freed myself or some one found me. But his plan must have miscarried for he didn't come back. It was so very cold and I was so lightly clad that at first I didn't dare to start out even after I'd broken the door open. But two days of hunger made me desperate. The trail was fairly well snowed in but I headed for what I thought would be Nelson's ranch. But in an hour or so I was all in. If Elijah hadn't found me, I'd have died of the cold up there on the mountainside."

"I was riding over to Lost Trail for news," explained Elijah.

"You were riding for God, I'd say," cried Mr. Fowler. "And if I'd been a Mormon bishop I couldn't have been made more welcome than I have been here."

"A preacher's a preacher," said Elijah. "Well, Douglas, what's next on your program?"

Douglas looked at Judith. "I've promised to take Judith up to Mountain City. She's going to get a job up there, and I am too!"

Judith put down her coffee-cup and her great eyes blazed. "Why, Douglas Spencer! You are going to do nothing of the sort!"

"What is Lost Chief to me without you?" asked Douglas, coolly and entirely ignoring the eager-eyed audience.

Judith's face expressed entire disapproval. "I never thought you'd let them run you out, Doug!" She turned to Mr. Fowler. "Don't let him be a quitter, Mr. Fowler."

Mr. Fowler was watching Douglas with troubled eyes. "I don't know," he said, "that I blame Douglas. It seems to me that Lost Chief will have to become conscious of its needs before it can be helped. I love Douglas very much. I'd not be sorry to see him get out into

the world where there's a bigger chance for his abilities than in that godless valley."

Judith turned from the preacher impatiently. "Douglas Spencer! You know you'll never be happy anywhere else. Lost Chief is your home and the home of all your people before you."

"How about its being home to you?" asked Douglas.

"No place can be home to me that doesn't need all that's in me," replied Judith. "Lost Chief is no place for me. It's not a woman's country."

"It ought to be made fit for women and for little children!" cried Mr. Fowler, with sudden vehemence. "I should have done it. But I failed there as I have everywhere. I didn't bring God to Lost Chief, nor to Judith, nor worst of all, to Douglas."

"Don't you two young people believe in God?" demanded Elijah Nelson.

They stared at him without replying.

"Who guided Judith over the Pass?" asked the Mormon. "Her own smartness, I suppose, or chance, anything but the hand of the Almighty!"

"It was Destiny. All of it has been Destiny," said Douglas suddenly.

"And what is Destiny but God?" asked Elijah.

No one spoke for a moment. Then Elijah went on, with Mr. Fowler's own vehemence:

"You folks over in Lost Chief have seen fit to treat us Mormons as if we were a pack of coyotes bedding down too near your herds. Did you ever try to find out what kind of people we really are and why we stay and win out when we settle in a place? I'll tell you. The church makes our settlements for us. When she calls us to settle in the wild she says, Go, five families, or ten, or twenty, and settle in such a place. Take with

you your wives and babies. Put your roots deep in the soil. Build for the future generations. Make a community deep fertilized by the idea of Mormonism, train your children in it, cling one family to the other in helpfulness and to the church in faith. Co-operate with each other and with the church, and the church will stand by you and loan you money, give you advice, be your very fountain of life.

"And the church does stand by us and we by it. And we are building up God-fearing communities all over the West, just like the Puritans once built up in the East. Why? Because we pioneer, inspired by our church and the love of God! What Gentile church is doing this, answering the economic needs of its people as well as the spiritual? Why should a settlement like yours prosper? Why, the most promising young man in it is deserting it to chase after a flighty girl! It has no church. It has no minister. Ha! As long as you Gentiles are so, the Mormons can ride over you and crowd you out!"

"You can't do anything of the kind!" declared Judith.

"Why not?" asked Douglas bitterly. "Of course they can! Nelson is dead right."

Elijah gave Judith a scornful glance. "You ought to be satisfied, Judith. You'll be getting your own way, no matter what becomes of Douglas. He ought never to leave Lost Chief. Though it will be better for us Mormons if he does."

Douglas was following his own line of thought. "The Mormons are right," he said. "It's the families that count. A man can't do real pioneering without a woman and Lost Chief is still pioneering. The right kind

of a woman could do more for Lost Chief than a man."

Judith looked at him with gathering intentness. "How could she, Doug?"

"Why, look at the influence Inez has! She's thought it worth while to influence people, so's to justify her way of living. She's beautiful and she's bad. If a woman who was beautiful and good made up her mind to make Lost Chief the paradise it ought to be, nothing could stop her."

"If she had the church to back her," said Elijah Nelson.

Douglas nodded; then, his face aflame, he jumped to his feet. "If Jude and I could work together in Lost Chief we'd— My God, do you know what I'd do? I'd rebuild the cabin and I'd rebuild the chapel. And we'd bring Mr. Fowler back. And Judith and I would go to church to him and we'd hunt for God till we found Him! And when we found Him, we'd go out and bring the children of the Valley to the church. It's the children that count. We'd dish all this discussion with the grown folks. All the Scotts and Charletons and Inez Rodmans in the Valley wouldn't count if the children would be sure of God." He turned to Judith. "You'll admit, won't you, Jude, that if you and I had had faith, our childhood would have been a finer thing?"

"Yes, I think that's true," admitted Judith. "Do you think there's a job there for me, Mr. Fowler, all faithless as I am?"

Mr. Fowler nodded. "Yes, I do. Lost Chief offers a full-sized job to a woman with a brain and the right kind of a vision. She could, indeed, help to make it a very paradise for children."

"If the church didn't hamper her too much." Mrs. Nelson spoke for the first time. "The church and God are both males."

Judith gave the Mormon wife a sudden appreciative smile. Douglas, watching the girl's kindling face, said in his gentle way, "I've often thought if anybody could get the right kind of a moral hold on the kids of Lost Chief, the greatest horsemanship in the world could be developed in that old valley."

"You are dreaming dreams!" exclaimed Nelson. "All this takes time, and you Lost Chief folks want to realize that the Mormons are coming!"

Judith eyed her host keenly; then she turned to Douglas with overwhelming interest welling to her eyes. "This is the first time," she cried, "that you've ever suggested any kind of a future to me that made a demand on my intelligence. Mr. Nelson, have you really got your eyes on Lost Chief Valley, or are you just trying to bluff Douglas into going back because you like him?"

The Mormon's eyes narrowed and his jaw set. "I like him, yes, but the church says we are to take Lost Chief Valley, and we are going to take it when the time is ripe. I can afford to be as kind as I want to be to Douglas and Fowler. Nothing can stop us when we cross into your valley with the church behind us. You folks hang together by habit. We Mormons are knit together by a divine idea that takes care of every moment of our lives. Do you think a man like Scott Parsons can guard your gates? And Douglas is running away!"

Judith jumped to her feet, indignation flashing from her eyes.

"He is not! If your Mormon religion can do all you claim for you, then our religion can do as much for us as it did for our ancestors. I never did believe

there was a God. But that's not saying He's not to be found if you really hunt for Him."

"'If with all your hearts ye truly seek me, ye shall ever surely find me,'" said Mr. Fowler quietly.

Judith gave him a quick look. "That isn't the kind of a God we young folks are looking for," she said.

"What is your idea?" asked Mr. Fowler.

Judith lifted her chin.

> "A fire mist and a planet,
> A crystal and a cell,
> A jelly-fish and a saurian
> And caves where cave-men dwell.
> Then a sense of law and beauty,
> And a face turned from the clod,
> Some call it Evolution
> And others call it God."

There was quiet in the warm, homely kitchen. Douglas watched Judith with his heart in his eyes.

Elijah Nelson cleared his throat. "Nevertheless, Judith," he said, "this is a fair warning that I'm going to put the Book of Mormon into Lost Chief."

Judith flushed, her lips tightened, and she walked deliberately around the table and took the preacher's hand. "Come, Mr. Fowler, let's go home with Douglas and get to work!"

Douglas drew a long breath.

The preacher rose with alacrity. "Where shall we go?" he asked.

Douglas answered. "To Peter's until I can rebuild the cabin."

Elijah Nelson smiled grimly.

"Let's get started!" urged Judith.

The breakfast party broke up. The men went out to attend to the horses. Judith and Mrs. Nelson turned to the dishes. Douglas from the corral watched the back-

door attentively, and when Mrs. Nelson appeared he signaled to her to wait for him to speak to her.

"Send Jude into the living-room for something," he whispered, "and then keep the folks out while I talk to her for a little while."

Mrs. Nelson smiled understandingly, and a few moments later Douglas was standing with his back to the living-room stove, both of his arms about Judith.

"I had to thank you," he said, "and you were too stupid to make the chance. Judith! Judith! You've made the world into heaven for me!"

"I'm not exactly unhappy, myself!" Judith's eyes glowed as she returned Doug's look.

"Judith," he exclaimed, "let's ask Mr. Fowler to marry us now, before we start home!"

Judith whitened a little. "O Douglas, you are crowding me, my dear!"

"But why wait, Judith? Isn't it the only thing to do? Neither of us will ever go back to Dad's ranch again. We can be married and camp with Peter until we get the cabin rebuilt. That's won't take a month. O, Judith, please!"

"It's—it's too soon!"

"Too soon for what? We've been caring a long, long time, and we need each other so!"

Judith freed herself from Douglas' arms and walked over to the window, from which one could see Black Devil Peak glowering in the morning sun. She stood a long time, it seemed to Douglas. He wondered what thoughts were passing in that fine head outlined against the snowy fields. What sense of sacrifice, he thought, must a girl like Jude have, in giving up her life to a man? Then he smiled, half grimly, half tenderly.

Judith would never be any man's really, to know and to hold. Her fiery charm was a thing ever to pursue, never fully to overtake. "Forever would he love and she be fair!" He waited silently, his heart thudding heavily. At last she turned from the window and came slowly toward him with a look in her eyes he could not pretend to read to its depths. He only knew that there was faith in him there and a passionate affection. What more, he was willing to trust to the future. She came and leaned against him and he knew that at last the long struggle was ended.

They were married a few moments later, standing before the window, with Douglas' hair a halo of gold above his steady eyes and Judith's fine head held high. The Reverend Mr. Fowler performed the rites with a trembling voice. When he had finished he said to Elijah and his wife:

"In all my long experience I have never joined together a couple with such infinite satisfaction as this."

"That's good," said Mrs. Nelson, wiping her eyes, "seeing that you're going on the wedding-journey with them!"

That afternoon, as the shadows on the plains east of the post-office grew long and blue-black, Judith, Douglas and Mr. Fowler jingled up to Peter's door. They slung their saddles on the buck fence, turned their horses into his corral, and went in. Peter was standing by the stove, dressed for a cold ride.

"Judith! You are safe!" he gasped, taking both her hands in his, his sallow face suddenly glowing. "Where did you find her, Doug?"

"Just the other side of Black Devil Pass!"

Peter whistled, stared, then turned to the preacher. "And where did you come from, Fowler?"

"Elijah Nelson rescued me from the west side of Lost Chief Peak."

Judith was pulling off her mackinaw and her beaver cap. "We'll tell you a wonderful story if you'll feed us, Peter."

Peter undid the silk handkerchief from his ears. "I was outfitting to follow Doug's trail. We buried poor little old Johnny this morning."

The quick tears sprang to Judith's eyes; but she said nothing, and Peter went on, "I got your father home on Monday. My guess is that he is ashamed enough of himself to last the rest of his life. That's about the extent of my stories. Have you any casualties to report?"

"Only poor Buster. He lies in a snowdrift up on the other side of Black Devil. We put in last night at Elijah Nelson's, where we found Mr. Fowler. Can we stay with you for a while, Peter?"

"You sure can. We can use those rooms upstairs for sleeping. Fine! I'll be glad to have you. You too, Fowler."

"Where's Scott Parsons?" asked Douglas.

"He's still with Inez. Seems like you gave him a bad knock-out. He's having rough going, I can tell you. Inez has turned against him and Grandma Brown had to go over there and take care of him. And she is in no frame of mind to stand anything from anybody." Peter chuckled, then went on. "Charleton says he was in bed and asleep by eleven o'clock Saturday night, and nobody has been able to prove that he wasn't. I don't think there is a doubt in the world that it was Scott and Charleton did the dirty work, but it's going to be hard to prove."

Peter set a kettle of beans on the stove and Judith prepared a pot of coffee.

"Take off your spurs, Fowler," Peter nodded genially at the preacher. "All's well that ends well. I hope that nothing more than your feelings got hurt."

To Peter's utter astonishment Mr. Fowler suddenly laughed heartily.

"My feelings, Peter," he exclaimed, "were never in better trim than they are this minute."

"Nor mine!" agreed Douglas.

"Nor mine!" added Judith.

Peter stared from one face to another. "It sort of looks," he said finally, "as if I had sweated blood for nothing."

"No, you haven't, Peter!" exclaimed Douglas. "Tragedy certainly stalked our tracks."

"Let me have the story," begged the postmaster. "Jude, after you left John and old Johnny, what happened? You evidently went plumb crazy. Begin at that point. And don't leave out anything!"

He lighted his pipe and sat down. Judith, swinging her spurred boots as she sat on the table, began obediently. She took Peter along every hour of her trip until she fell into that dreadful sleep on the south slope of Black Devil. Douglas took up his story there and when he had finished, Mr. Fowler repeated the account of his adventure.

Peter heaved a great sigh. "Some adventure! Lord! Lord! What a narrow squeak! Well, and what did our Mormon friends have to say to all these doings?"

Judith and Douglas smiled at each other. Peter, catching that smile, started forward in his chair, then

turned to Fowler. The preacher smiled broadly. "Let me tell that part of it," he begged. Douglas and Judith nodded, and the old man plunged with great enjoyment into the account of the happenings that morning at Nelson's ranch.

When he finished with the wedding, Peter rose, his face working. He walked over to Judith and looked deep into her eyes, and without a word kissed her on the cheek. Then he wrung Douglas' hand.

"Hang it all!" he said. "There is something startlingly right the way life works out if you give it a chance!"

Nobody answered. Douglas and Judith were smiling at each other and the preacher was engrossed in watching them. Peter cleared his throat.

"What are you happy idiots going to do about Scott and Charleton?"

"I had planned to get even with them and run them out of the Valley," said Douglas; "but, after all, I owe them a debt of gratitude. Even if they didn't mean it that way!"

"We'd better not start our new life in the Valley with a fight," Judith nodded. "Anyhow we've agreed that we aren't concerned right now with the grown-ups."

Peter scratched his head. "I guess you are sensible. But I think pressure can be brought to bear to make Charleton and Scott rebuild the cabin and chapel for you."

Mr. Fowler shook his head vehemently. "I wouldn't let their hands desecrate the chapel! Douglas and I are going to build it."

"And I wouldn't let them desecrate the cabin," declared Judith. "So I guess they are out of it. We're going

to give them a thorough drubbing but quite in another way."

Peter chuckled with huge enjoyment. "What are you going to do about Elijah Nelson's threat to take Lost Chief Valley over for the Mormons?"

"I don't know yet," said Douglas; "but we're not going to let him do it, are we, Judith?"

"We certainly are not! That's one reason I want to keep Scott in the Valley. If Scott could get the idea of fighting with his mind instead of his gun, he'd be a good citizen."

Peter grinned at Fowler. "The infants are running the Valley already! Well, why not? They are the new generation."

"Peter," demanded Judith, "aren't those beans ready yet?"

The postmaster started to his feet. "I suppose you folks are hungry. Judith, you set the table. Doug, did you feed the horses well? It's going to be a bitter-cold night."

"Yes, we took care of them," replied Douglas, absent-mindedly, his eyes on Judith.

"Did you?" Peter turned to Fowler. "I sha'n't take Doug's word about anything that's happened subsequent to the ceremony."

"I think you're wise," nodded the preacher. "But as a matter of fact, we did feed them. Shall I put the chairs up?"

"Go ahead," said Peter, setting the pot of beans in the middle of the table.

Then, as they gathered around the table, the preacher hesitated, looked from one face to another, and asked, "Do you mind if I say grace?"

"No," replied Peter firmly, "we don't mind. You can say grace, make signs, or do anything else that will help you hang on in the big fight you've got ahead of you. I'll say it too, if it will strengthen your hands."

Mr. Fowler shook his head, smiled, and covering his eyes, poured out his heart to the Almighty.

THE END

Popular Copyright Novels

AT MODERATE PRICES

Ask Your Dealer for a Complete List of

A. L. Burt Company's Popular Copyright Fiction

Adventures of Jimmie Dale, The. By Frank L. Packard.
Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. By A. Conan Doyle.
Affinities, and Other Stories. By Mary Roberts Rinehart.
After House, The. By Mary Roberts Rinehart.
Against the Winds. By Kate Jordan.
Ailsa Paige. By Robert W. Chambers.
Also Ran. By Mrs. Baillie Reynolds.
Amateur Gentleman, The. By Jeffery Farnol.
Anderson Crow, Detective. By George Barr McCutcheon
Anna, the Adventuress. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Anne's House of Dreams. By L. M. Montgomery.
Anybody But Anne. By Carolyn Wells.
Are All Men Alike, and The Lost Titian. By Arthur Stringer.
Around Old Chester. By Margaret Deland.
Ashton-Kirk, Criminologist. By John T. McIntyre.
Ashton-Kirk, Investigator. By John T. McIntyre.
Ashton-Kirk, Secret Agent. By John T. McIntyre.
Ashton-Kirk, Special Detective. By John T. McIntyre.
Athalie. By Robert W. Chambers.
At the Mercy of Tiberius. By Augusta Evans Wilson.
Auction Block, The. By Rex Beach.
Aunt Jane of Kentucky. By Eliza C. Hall.
Awakening of Helena Richie. By Margaret Deland.

Bab: a Sub-Deb. By Mary Roberts Rinehart.
Bambi. By Marjorie Benton Cooke.
Barbarians. By Robert W. Chambers.
Bar 20. By Clarence E. Mulford.
Bar 20 Days. By Clarence E. Mulford.
Barrier, The. By Rex Beach.
Bars of Iron, The. By Ethel M. Dell.
Beasts of Tarzan, The. By Edgar Rice Burroughs.
Beckoning Roads. By Jeanne Judson.
Belonging. By Olive Wadsley.
Beloved Traitor, The. By Frank L. Packard.
Beloved Vagabond, The. By Wm. J. Locke.
Beltane the Smith. By Jeffery Farnol.
Betrayal, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Beulah. (Ill. Ed.) By Augusta J. Evans.

Popular Copyright Novels

AT MODERATE PRICES

Ask Your Dealer for a Complete List of

A. L. Burt Company's Popular Copyright Fiction

Beyond the Frontier. By Randall Parrish.
Big Timber. By Bertrand W. Sinclair.
Black Bartlemy's Treasure. By Jeffery Farnol.
Black Is White. By George Barr McCutcheon.
Blacksheep! Blacksheep!. By Meredith Nicholson.
Blind Man's Eyes, The. By Wm. Mac Harg and Edwin Balmer.
Boardwalk, The. By Margaret Widdemer.
Bob Hampton of Placer. By Randall Parrish.
Bob, Son of Battle. By Alfred Olivant.
Box With Broken Seals, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Boy With Wings, The. By Berta Ruck.
Brandon of the Engineers. By Harold Bindloss.
Bridge of Kisses, The. By Berta Ruck.
Broad Highway, The. By Jeffery Farnol.
Broadway Bab. By Johnston McCulley.
Brown Study, The. By Grace S. Richmond.
Bruce of the Circle A. By Harold Titus.
Buccaneer Farmer, The. By Harold Bindloss.
Buck Peters, Ranchman. By Clarence E. Mulford.
Builders, The. By Ellen Glasgow.
Business of Life, The. By Robert W. Chambers.

Cab of the Sleeping Horse, The. By John Reed Scott.
Cabbage and Kings. By O. Henry.
Cabin Fever. By B. M. Bower.
Calling of Dan Matthews, The. By Harold Bell Wright.
Cape Cod Stories. By Joseph C. Lincoln.
Cap'n Abe, Storekeeper. By James A. Cooper.
Cap'n Dan's Daughter. By Joseph C. Lincoln.
Cap'n Erl. By Joseph C. Lincoln.
Cap'n Jonah's Fortune. By James A. Cooper.
Cap'n Warren's Wards. By Joseph C. Lincoln.
Chinese Label, The. By J. Frank Davis.
Christine of the Young Heart. By Louise Breintenbach Clancy.
Cinderella Jane. By Marjorie B. Cooke.
Cinema Murder, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
City of Masks, The. By George Barr McCutcheon.
Cleek of Scotland Yard. By T. W. Hanshew.

Popular Copyright Novels

AT MODERATE PRICES

Ask Your Dealer for a Complete List of

A. L. Burt Company's Popular Copyright Fiction

Cleek, The Man of Forty Faces. By Thomas W. Hanshew.
Cleek's Government Cases. By Thomas W. Hanshew.
Clipped Wings. By Rupert Hughes.
Clutch of Circumstance, The. By Marjorie Benton Cooke.
Coast of Adventure, The. By Harold Bindloss.
Come-Back, The. By Carolyn Wells.
Coming of Cassidy, The. By Clarence E. Mulford.
Coming of the Law, The. By Charles A. Seltzer.
Comrades of Peril. By Randall Parrish.
Conquest of Canaan, The. By Booth Tarkington.
Conspirators, The. By Robert W. Chambers.
Contraband. By Randall Parrish.
Cottage of Delight, The. By Will N. Harben.
Court of Inquiry, A. By Grace S. Richmond.
Cricket, The. By Marjorie Benton Cooke.
Crimson Gardenia, The, and Other Tales of Adventure. By Rex Beach.
Crimson Tide, The. By Robert W. Chambers.
Cross Currents. By Author of "Pollyanna."
Cross Pull, The. By Hal. G. Evarts.
Cry in the Wilderness, A. By Mary E. Waller.
Cry of Youth, A. By Cynthia Lombardi.
Cup of Fury, The. By Rupert Hughes.
Curious Quest, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.

Danger and Other Stories. By A. Conan Doyle.
Dark Hollow, The. By Anna Katharine Green.
Dark Star, The. By Robert W. Chambers.
Daughter Pays, The. By Mrs. Baillie Reynolds.
Day of Days, The. By Louis Joseph Vance.
Depot Master, The. By Joseph C. Lincoln.
Destroying Angel, The. By Louis Joseph Vance.
Devil's Own, The. By Randall Parrish.
Devil's Paw, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Disturbing Charm, The. By Berta Ruck.
Door of Dread, The. By Arthur Stringer.
Dope. By Sax Rohmer.
Double Traitor, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Duds. By Henry C. Rowland.

Popular Copyright Novels

AT MODERATE PRICES

Ask Your Dealer for a Complete List of

A. L. Burt Company's Popular Copyright Fiction

Empty Pockets. By Rupert Hughes.
Erskine Dale Pioneer. By John Fox, Jr.
Everyman's Land. By C. N. & A. M. Williamson.
Extricating Obadiah. By Joseph C. Lincoln.
Eyes of the Blind, The. By Arthur Somers Roche.
Eyes of the World, The. By Harold Bell Wright.

Fairfax and His Pride. By Marie Van Vorst.
Felix O'Day. By F. Hopkinson Smith.
54-40 or Fight. By Emerson Hough.
Fighting Chance, The. By Robert W. Chambers.
Fighting Fool, The. By Dane Coolidge.
Fighting Shepherdess, The. By Caroline Lockhart.
Financier, The. By Theodore Dreiser.
Find the Woman. By Arthur Somers Roche.
First Sir Percy, The. By The Baroness Orczy.
Flame, The. By Olive Wadsley.
For Better, for Worse. By W. B. Maxwell.
Forbidden Trail, The. By Honorè Willsie.
Forfeit, The. By Ridgwell Cullum.
Fortieth Door, The. By Mary Hastings Bradley.
Four Million, The. By O. Henry.
From Now On. By Frank L. Packard.
Fur Bringers, The. By Hulbert Footner.
Further Adventures of Jimmie Dale. By Frank L. Packard.

Get Your Man. By Ethel and James Dorrance.
Girl in the Mirror, The. By Elizabeth Jordan.
Girl of O. K. Valley, The. By Robert Watson.
Girl of the Blue Ridge, A. By Payne Erskine.
Girl from Keller's, The. By Harold Bindloss.
Girl Philippa, The. By Robert W. Chambers.
Girls at His Billet, The. By Berta Ruck.
Glory Rides the Range. By Ethel and James Dorrance.
Gloved Hand, The. By Burton E. Stevenson.
God's Country and the Woman. By James Oliver Curwood.
God's Good Man. By Marie Corelli.
Going Some. By Rex Beach.
Gold Girl, The. By James B. Hendryx.
Golden Scorpion, The. By Sax Rohmer.

Popular Copyright Novels

AT MODERATE PRICES

Ask Your Dealer for a Complete List of

A. L. Burt Company's Popular Copyright Fiction

Golden Slipper, The. By Anna Katharine Green.
Golden Woman, The. By Ridgwell Cullum.
Good References. By E. J. Rath.
Gorgeous Girl, The. By Nalbro Bartley.
Gray Angels, The. By Nalbro Bartley.
Great Impersonation, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Greater Love Hath No Man. By Frank L. Packard.
Green Eyes of Bast, The. By Sax Rohmer.
Greyfriars Bobby. By Eleanor Atkinson.
Gun Brand, The. By James B. Hendryx.

Hand of Fu-Manchu, The. By Sax Rohmer.
Happy House. By Baroness Von Hutten.
Harbor Road, The. By Sara Ware Bassett.
Havoc. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Heart of the Desert, The. By Honorè Willsie.
Heart of the Hills, The. By John Fox, Jr.
Heart of the Sunset. By Rex Beach.
Heart of Thunder Mountain, The. By Edfrid A. Bingham.
Heart of Unaga, The. By Ridgwell Cullum.
Hidden Children, The. By Robert W. Chambers.
Hidden Trails. By William Patterson White.
Highflyers, The. By Clarence B. Kelland.
Hillman, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Hills of Refuge, The. By Will N. Harben.
His Last Bow. By A. Conan Doyle.
His Official Fiancee. By Berta Ruck.
Honor of the Big Snows. By James Oliver Curwood.
Hopalong Cassidy. By Clarence E. Mulford.
Hound from the North, The. By Ridgwell Cullum.
House of the Whispering Pines, The. By Anna Katharine Green.
Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker. By S. Weir Mitchell, M.D.
Humoresque. By Fannie Hurst.

I Conquered. By Harold Titus.
Illustrious Prince, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
In Another Girl's Shoes. By Berta Ruck.
Indifference of Juliet, The. By Grace S. Richmond.
Inez. (Ill. Ed.) By Augusta J. Evans.

Popular Copyright Novels

AT MODERATE PRICES

Ask Your Dealer for a Complete List of

A. L. Burt Company's Popular Copyright Fiction

Infelice. By Augusta Evans Wilson.
Initials Only. By Anna Katharine Green.
Inner Law, The. By Will N. Harben.
Innocent. By Marie Corelli.
In Red and Gold. By Samuel Merwin.
Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu, The. By Sax Rohmer.
In the Brooding Wild. By Ridgwell Cullum.
Intriguers, The. By William Le Queux.
Iron Furrow, The. By George C. Shedd.
Iron Trail, The. By Rex Beach.
Iron Woman, The. By Margaret Deland.
Ishmael. (Ill.) By Mrs. Southworth.
Island of Surprise. By Cyrus Townsend Brady.
I Spy. By Natalie Sumner Lincln.
It Pays to Smile. By Nina Wilcox Putnam.
I've Married Marjorie. By Margaret Widdemer.

Jean of the Lazy A. By B. M. Bower.
Jeanne of the Marshes. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
Jennie Gerhardt. By Theodore Dreiser.
Johnny Nelson. By Clarence E. Mulford.
Judgment House, The. By Gilbert Parker.

Keeper of the Door, The. By Ethel M. Dell.
Keith of the Border. By Randall Parrish.
Kent Knowles: Quahaug. By Joseph C. Lincoln.
Kingdom of the Blind, The. By E. Phillips Oppenheim.
King Spruce. By Holman Day.
Knave of Diamonds, The. By Ethel M. Dell.

La Chance Mine Mystery, The. By S. Carleton.
Lady Doc, The. By Caroline Lockhart.
Land-Girl's Love Story, A. By Berta Ruck.
Land of Strong Men, The. By A. M. Chisholm.
Last Straw, The. By Harold Titus.
Last Trail, The. By Zane Grey.
Laughing Bill Hyde. By Rex Beach.
Laughing Girl, The. By Robert W. Chambers.
Law Breakers, The. By Ridgwell Cullum.
Law of the Gun, The. By Ridgwell Cullum.